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The Holy Infant Jesus

THE

CHILDREN

OF THE

NEW TESTAMENT.

"Of such is the kingdom of heaven."—JESUS.

"How oft, heart-sick and sore,
I've wished I were, once more,
A little child!"—MRS. SOUTHEY.

BY

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Second Edition.

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PREFACE.

It was on a bright and balmy afternoon in the leafy month of May, as we sat with a friend on a grassy knoll, overlooking the picturesque scenery of the Schuylkill, that the idea of this little book was first suggested. Surrounded with the fresh and springing beauty of the season, we felt ourselves in sympathy with nature, rejuvenated, and, as in our childhood, every thing seemed—

> "Apparelled in celestial light,
> The glory and the freshness of a dream."

It was by a very natural association in our minds, that the conversation turned upon little children. Our friend, for many years a faithful Sunday School teacher, related several touching incidents of recent occurrence in his school, illustrating the fond affection of little children for those manifesting a kindly interest in them,

and how quick and responsive their sympathy to every token of kindliness and love.

After some interchange of sentiment upon this attractive feature of childhood, our thoughts turned to the several scenes in the New Testament, in which little children were brought to view in attitudes and relations so beautiful and attractive. And the opinion was mutually expressed, that a collection of these scenes, with such reflections as they would naturally suggest, into the form of a little book, might prove both interesting and profitable.

The idea has been actualized and embodied in this little work. As it makes no great pretensions, it needs no apology.

Originality belongs to comparatively few. We have not hesitated to adopt leading ideas from Olshausen and other German writers, as well as from Chalmers, Melvill, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Cheever, and others.* Where we have employed the thoughts and phraseology of others, we have acknowledged our indebtedness by the usual marks of quotation.

If the poetical quotations are numerous, it is owing partly to our fondness for thoughts in that form of

* This acknowledgment is especially applicable to chapters 2d and 3d.

expression, as well as to the fact, that our thoughts assume their best attitudes and loveliest attire in Poetry, which is "the blossom and fragrancy of all human knowledge."

The idea that a book is original, in proportion to the absence of all quotational signs, is, we think, a fallacy. There may be least originality, where there are no signs of quotation. And according to D'Israeli, the man who never quotes from others, is, in turn, rarely ever quoted by any body else.

The reader will notice, that in the classification of the Scripture scenes, we have inverted the order observed in the sacred record. The reason of this will be at once obvious, and, therefore, needs no explanation.

Our design has been simply to bring consecutively to view, these picture scenes of little children in the New Testament, and evolve the moral lessons they infold, and apply them to practical improvement. And, if this humble effort shall serve to awaken a livelier interest, and a more solemn sense of responsibility, in our relations to little children, and quicken the efforts of Christians, in the religious education of the young, under a conviction of their important

instrumental connection with the advancement of Christ's kingdom, we shall be satisfied.

And we are encouraged in the hope of such a result, from the fact, that a book small in size and attractive in its outward appearance, may find access, where books of larger bulk, and more elaborate argument, would be unwelcome. "Ships of small draught may sail up the tributary streams of the popular mind, where vessels of heavy tonnage cannot be admitted."

We commend this plea for little children — and these affectionate monitions to Christian parents — and the consolatory thoughts for the bereaved, to the Spirit and blessing of —

> "*Him*, whose praise I seek —
> Whose frown can disappoint the proudest aim,
> Whose approbation, prosper even mine."

Philadelphia, Dec. 1853.

TO THE

FRIENDS

OF

Little Children,

THESE

SCRIPTURE SCENES

ARE

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

AND DEDICATED

BY THE

AUTHOR.

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THE

CHILDREN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Chapter First.

THE HOLY CHILD JESUS.—Acts iv. 27.

"O! is it not a blessed thought,
Children of human birth,
That once the Saviour was a child,
And lived upon the earth?"

There is an obvious propriety in devoting this first chapter to the "Holy Child Jesus." In proposing to speak of the little children of the New Testament, the first place is due to the pre-eminence of the Divine Child; and, in addition to the moral fitness of this arrangement, it is also in harmony with the order of the sacred history.

Our first ideas of the Saviour, derived from scripture prophecy and history, are associated with his coming as a little child. The most remote, as well as the proximate intimations of his advent, were given in the promise of a child. The first promise that sounded amid the wreck of Eden, like the first notes of the Gospel, and arched the clouded earth with the bright rainbow of hope, was given in language that awakened the expectation that the promised Messiah would come as a little child. Such seems to have been the idea of our primeval Mother, causing that simple and childlike outburst of her heart, as she looked upon her first-born son, with the words of joy and transport, "I have gotten a man from the Lord!" words expressive of the secret hope of her heart that her first-born son was the promised "seed of the woman."

Among the most distinct announcements of his coming, in the Messianic prophecies, is that of the rapturous Isaiah, catching, in prophetic vision, a glimpse of the wonders of Bethlehem, exclaiming — "Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." The

inspired prophet sees the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace, in that little child in Bethlehem.

And "when the fulness of the time" was at hand, the proximate intimation of the fact was given in the promise made to the devout Zacharias, that his wife Elizabeth should bear him a son, and that he should be a holy child, and many should rejoice at his birth." Luke i. 13, 14, 15.

And as the ecstatic father folded that son of promise in his arms, he was moved to pour forth the gushing emotions of his joy in the prophetic exclamation, "Thou, *child*, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest!"— He saw in that child the Forerunner of the Messiah — the beauteous morning-star that heralds the coming day.

"The Harbinger of the Gospel was a *sanctified little child.*"

In harmony with these pre-intimations, the Messiah came as a child. When the humble shepherds received the message, "Unto you is *born* a Saviour," and had listened with bewildered joy to his birth-hymn sung by the angels, "Glory to God in the highest," they went to Bethlehem, and found Mary and Joseph, and the *Babe* lying in a manger.

The Magi of Persia saw His star in the evening sky, beckoning them to Judea. It was to them the star of Jacob, and, moved by a divine impulse, they make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and inquire, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" Directed to Bethlehem, they renew their journey—"and lo! the star which they saw in the east went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was." They were filled with ecstatic joy—"the morning-star of their hope had become the evening-star of their desire accomplished."

"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young *child*, with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped *Him*."

Thus beautiful are the associations of Messiah's kingdom with a little child. Nor are we to regard it as an unmeaning coincidence. There is a touching significance in the fact that the Son of God came as a little child, yet a Saviour. "It was to teach us that he is the Saviour of little children, who bear his likeness more closely than the best disciple of mature years ever can, as well as of the adults who believe in his name. It was to claim the whole world of infancy as his own, however men might reject his grace. It was to assure

the anxious mother bending over his image in her child, that

> She may trust her sweet babe through the hour of danger,
> To the mercy of Him, who was laid in a manger."

As we turn and look at that picture of the Nativity, (as represented in our frontispiece,) and recall the wonders of Bethlehem, we feel the dread but touching mystery which surrounds the *Babe* in the manger, and our hearts are bowed with the prostrate Magi in worship.

That little child is the incarnate God! a Being at once human and divine. That little hand is the hand of Him who of old laid the foundations of the earth, and stretched abroad the heavens as a curtain; that infant cry is the voice of Him, who, in the beginning, said, "Let there be light, and there was light!" Our reason is bewildered, and our conceptions of what we see are dim and misty. Can this be what was promised in Paradise Lost? Was it this, seen in the dim distance, that gladdened the heart of Abraham? Was it this that made the dying eyes of Jacob flash with the glory of the latter days? How can it be? We look again, but our thoughts seem to commingle in a confused and gloomy shade, and the only distinct consciousness is that of mystery. We turn to the Gospel,

and read with the scene still before us—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." Then, however it may baffle our understanding, that mysterious child *is* Emmanuel, God with us. We receive the incarnation as a fact of Divine revelation; and if any in their stultified reason ask, "What kind of a revelation is the revelation of a mystery?" we answer that it is the revelation of a fact, all the modes and relations of which are not known; a revelation analogous to that of nature — for she surrounds us with facts, and leaves us in the midst of mysteries to wonder and adore. The Bible reveals great facts, as the night shows the stars, and, like Nature, leaves us standing in the midst of infinity, surrounded with mystery, with a thousand questions unanswered. (Hopkins.)

And there is no conflict between reason and mystery; they are equally conditions of a spiritual but limited existence; and it must be equally obvious, that to finite beings, religion dissociated from mystery is impossible. A religion without a mystery would be a religion without spiritual attributes, without immortality, a religion without a God! Fichte, speaking of the Incompre-

hensible One, says, "What I understand is, from my very understanding it, finite, and by no progression can ever be transformed into the Infinite. I will not attempt that which my finite nature forbids. I will not seek to know the nature and essence of thy being."

It is with something of this feeling I receive the doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God. I receive it as a fact of Divine revelation. It is a dread and impenetrable mystery which transcends my reason, and eludes all human analysis. The fact I know, that God is incarnate in Christ Jesus; but the modes and relations of the fact are too subtle, too vast, too profound for human thought. There is in the mysterious union of the Divine and human an inherent necessity, veiling it in a profound and sacred obscurity.

But if it baffles my understanding, it touches and moves my heart, as no other fact ever has done, or can do. It meets a want of my spiritual nature, which nothing else can satisfy. The mind can never rest with mere abstractions; it demands living realities. And hence, if it has not this great objective fact of Christianity, God in Christ, it will either lose all consciousness of God, or, as in Paganism, fashion some symbol of divinity, however degrading; or, as in more

thoughtful minds, run into Rationalism, which has its real foundation in that theory of Pantheism, "which ends in deifying the natural powers of man. For put the Incarnation out of view, and Pantheism is the natural resource of reflective minds."*

An abstract spirit, infinite in purity and love, is indeed a grand conception; but it is too cold, undefined, and distant, to satisfy the heart. There is still a conscious yearning for something to unite, according to Schleirmacher's view, the human consciousness with the Divine. And this is found in Christ. In him God draws nigh to us, and we see and feel his glory in the face of Jesus. In him we have a living incarnation of the Godhead. And though to the understanding it is a solemn and unfathomable mystery, the heart apprehends the ineffable idea, and is thrilled with a responsive love, conscious of having found God in Christ — and in him a solution of the mysterious yearnings of the soul for the infinite and immortal. By faith in him, the heart finds a brother, Saviour, friend; and exultingly exclaims, with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"

God incarnate in Christ; it is a mystery sublime and

* Wilberforce on the Incarnation, p. 27.

beautiful! But once seen by faith, realized to the heart in its saving and practical relations, it diffuses through the soul "peace like a river;" it transforms us with a divine glory. But it is only in an attitude of prostrate and devout worship, like that of the magi at the feet of Jesus—it is only when the soul is bowed in lowliness and faith at the foot of the cross, that the sweet mystery and glory of God in Christ is seen and felt by the heart in its saving, all-transforming power. It was just in this spiritual lowliness and self-abasement before Christ, D'Aubigné tells us, he rose from prayer in the study of the learned Kleuker of Kiel, and felt all his doubts and difficulties removed, and the peace of God in his soul; and ever did he strive to keep his soul in that spiritual attitude at the foot of the cross. And it was thus, we are informed, that the distinguished scholar, Francis Junius, was recovered from absolute atheism, by a clear and sudden view of the glory of Christ, leading him to exclaim, "Thou, Lord my God, didst remember me, and received me, a lost sheep, into thy fold." And this, we believe, is substantially the experience of every Christian. Whatever mystery may surround the doctrine of "God manifest in the flesh" in the apprehensions of the mind, there is none

in the heart. God in Christ received into the affections by a simple childlike faith, is the beginning of a divine light and life in the soul full of peace and joy, transforming it into the image of Jesus, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord.

"I love th' incarnate mystery,
And there I fix my trust."

But in addition to this general aspect of the incarnation, there is something inexpressibly beautiful and touching in the fact, that the Son of God appeared as a child. "It is a remarkable circumstance," says Barnes, "in the scripture account of the incarnation of the Son of God, that he did not at once assume the human form in its mature and manly proportions: that the second Adam did not appear on the stage as the first did, already a man in shape and stature, the most noble and beautiful of the race; but that he appeared as a child, with all the innocent characteristics and sympathies of a child.'

There was nothing unnatural or incongruous in the Godhead veiling itself in the form of a child. Some men, with their ideas of material vastness and expansion associated with their conceptions of God, have felt as if there was a kind of compression of the Divine Glory in

that Babe of Bethlehem. But if we view God as a spirit, having no essential affinity with material vastness or grandeur, and conceive of his glory as consisting in spiritual excellences and perfections, there is no difficulty in seeing that glory in the immaculate child Jesus. "The true Shekinah," says Chrysostom, "is Man." But an innocent child is in some respects nearer the infinite, nearer Heaven, than a man, for

'Heaven lies about us in our infancy."

And we may therefore say with perhaps greater propriety, that the true Shekinah is a little child, and that the most beautiful shrine of Deity was that sinless child. "And in him dwelt," even then, "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." "And those who saw him and believed, felt that Godhead lay in him softly and fully, as the image of the sun in a drop of dew."

But whatever of mystery may surround that scene in Bethlehem — however humbling to all the pretensions of human reason in its vain attempts to measure the dimensions of that infant cradle — however opposed to all our preconceptions of the Messiah — the fact has touched the sympathies of mankind,

and won the heart of the world, as no other fact ever has done, or can do. The simple but sublime fact that the Eternal Word was veiled in an infant form, and lived as a little child.

> "The happiest, the holiest,
> That ever blessed the earth."

How has the heart of the world gathered around that Divine child! How anxiously has it sought to lift the veil which hangs over the early years of Jesus, and desired to know "the precise complexion of that moral dawn which preceded the pure and perfect effulgence that shone forth on the history of his riper years!"* And in the absence of a full history, how has fancy taken the detached glimpses of his childhood given in the gospel of Luke, and sought to picture the sinless child with an outward form — the personification of all that is lovely and beautiful: a cherub's face and smile, seraphic purity, and a voice whose tones were musical with heavenly sweetness! And yet such an ideal of the holy child Jesus would fall immeasurably below the reality. For such an ideal is, after all, conceived from human standards and comparisons of what we know. Whereas David, in

* Chalmers.

his prophetic picture of the Messiah, says, "Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips." Alexander renders the passage thus: "Beautiful, beautiful art thou above the sons of man. He is not praised as the fairest and most beautiful of men, but as fair or beautiful beyond all human standard or comparison. This general ascription of all loveliness is followed by the specification of a single charm, that of delightful captivating speech—grace or beauty of expression."* So that no ideal of human conception can reach the transcendent spiritual beauty and loveliness of the holy child Jesus. There are occasional glimpses of his early years in the gospel revealing those moral elements of character which, in their combinations and developments, afterwards appeared in the man Christ Jesus, who was holy and separate from sinners.

We have in successive touches of the sacred penman, the simple relation of his deference to the doctors in the temple, and his personal interest in the questions connected with the great subject of religion — his filial subjection to Joseph and Mary — and in Luke xi. 40, a summary of his infant history. "And the child grew

* Alexander on Psalms.

and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him."

This passage indicates the purely human development of Jesus in body as well as mind. The words, "the grace of God was upon him," are not only expressive of the divine complacency in Jesus, but indicative of the efficient cause of the pure unclouded development of the life of the Redeemer. He possessed a sinless intellect. There was no moral haze to obscure his expanding mind. The rays of light had not to struggle through the mists of error and sin, that surround the mind of a sinful child. He grew in wisdom, for it was the aliment of his sinless soul. The idea is clearly expressed of a gradual development of his mind. There was the dawn, the morning, and the advancing day; but it was a morning without obscuring mists, and a day with no overshadowing clouds. This idea is extracted and then expanded by Olshausen from the declaration, "the grace of God was upon him." In his exposition of this passage he says, "The grace is nothing but the ἀγάπη, "love," which manifests itself, and which proves itself efficacious. In every moment of the life of Jesus, the love of God was reflected in him as in a mirror; he was in every sense a child, in

every sense a youth, in every sense a man, and sanctified thus all the degrees of the development of humanity; but there never appeared in him anything inconsistent therewith, which would have been the case had expressions of a riper or advanced degree of life manifested itself during the period of his childhood."

These several allusions to the early human development of Jesus, and the occasional glimpses of the moral features of his childhood, pure and sinless in all its manifestations, may give us some approximate idea of the "holy child Jesus," as a pure, sinless, beautiful, perfect child.

We cannot omit an allusion to that touching incident in the history of the infancy of Jesus, associated with his presentation to the Lord in the Temple. That Gospel picture of the aged and devout Simeon, folding the infant Saviour to his heart, with that sweet, swan-like canticle gushing from his soul, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation," has cheered the imagination and heart of the world. Even Joseph and Mary, after all the previous wonders of Bethlehem, marvelled when they saw that pious old man holding the child in his arms, and heard those words of prophetic ecstacy that

glowed from his inspired lips. And no one that has ever read the Gospel forgets that scene. It has charmed the imagination of childhood, and lulled the aged saint to his last sweet sleep in Jesus. Never, says an eloquent preacher, was there a finer picture offered to the imagination. Old age gazing in raptured reverence on infancy; and the saint on the verge of heaven beholding in that innocent and helpless Babe, the light and life of the world.

The only event in the Saviour's life mentioned in the Gospel history prior to his appearance in public, is one of peculiar interest, as unfolding in the child the consciousness of his divine nature, and foreshadowing his divine mission. We last saw the infant Saviour, as an unconscious child, in the arms of the ecstatic Simeon; we see him now a holy and beautiful youth in the midst of the doctors in the temple, hearing and asking questions. "The opinion," says Olshausen, "that Jesus taught in the temple, must be dismissed as monstrous; an instructing, demonstrating child, would be a contradiction which the God of order could not possibly have placed in the world. The words "listening to," and "questioning," of ver. 46, refer clearly enough to his receptivity. The Scriptures, and the sublime hopes

which they awaken, must have formed no doubt the basis of his questions; he inquires after *himself;* and, we may say, that the whole struggle and longing displayed by the child Jesus was nothing but a desire for the revelation of himself."*

In his reply to the anxious and interrogating parents, we discover an awakening consciousness of his divine nature and mission. "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" These words lift the veil of mystery that hung round the holy child Jesus, and give us a glimpse of what he *then* was, and what he was destined to be. They are words expressive of a dawning consciousness of the special relation in which he stood to the Father as the Son of God, and a presentiment of his sublime spiritual destiny, and a foreshadowing of his future beneficent mission.

Beautiful indeed to the imagination, and lovely to the heart, is the aspect of the Saviour as the "holy child Jesus." "He was a child—a holy child—a divine child — an eternal child. He seems still to sit among the doctors, with Zoroaster, and Moses, and Confucius, and Socrates, and Plato, ranged around him, both hear-

* Olshausen's Com. on Luke.

ing them and asking them questions, while they, like the sheaves of Joseph's brethren, are compelled to bow down before the noble youth."*

But the fact that the Son of God came and lived as a child, is something more than an object of mere poetical beauty or sentimental influence. It has a doctrinal aspect of great practical and consolatory interest. Jesus was in every sense a child, that he might be a perfect Saviour of children, as well as of believing adults. "Wherefore," says the apostle, "in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren." May we not comprehend in this essential assimilation to our humanity, the assumption of human nature in its lowliest form, that thus "Jesus passing through all the stages of human life, from infancy to manhood, might sanctify them all." The idea is as true and Biblical as it is beautiful and consoling. It was thus Christ became a merciful and perfect High Priest — possessing a sympathy with every stage of human development, and every phase of human life; making him a perfect Saviour of little children, as well as of those of mature years; touched with a feeling of the infirmities of these little ones, in all their mental and emotional trials —

* Gilfillan, Bards of the Bible.

trials so subtile and hidden as to elude the eye even of a mother's love; sympathizing with those incipient evolutions of thought and feeling long before they can find expression in language, or awaken a responsive sympathy even in a mother's heart.

There is something intensely interesting in this idea of the Saviour, as once a little child, and retaining ever after a perfect consciousness of his human childhood, and a consequent sympathy with little ones, such as no other being can feel, not even a mother in all her deep and yearning affection. It was this that gave such a touch of gentleness and simplicity to his whole character; for even after he entered upon the great work of his manhood, the public teachings and redemptive works of his Divine mission, he seemed still to possess the moral beauty of a child. "His sermons, possessing no logical sequence and coherence, seem like the utterances of a divine infant." When he spake as man never spake—when he performed his miracles of mercy —when he gave utterance to truths and sentiments such as had never fallen from human lips, "he still retained all the simplicity of character which he had when a child, and evinced in his manner all that would meet the sympathies of a child, and go at once to his heart."

This also gave a peculiarity to his teachings, so clear and simple, so full of explanatory references to the beauties of nature, to fields of waving grain, and flowers, and birds, and fountains; illustrating the profoundest truths by simple and touching parables. All this peculiarity in the Saviour's method of instruction, evinced his own childlike simplicity of character, and made both himself and his teaching so attractive to the minds and hearts of children.

And this same feature will account in part for the interest he felt in the little ones; how he loved to look upon these beautiful emblems of innocence and purity, and fold them in his arms and bless them!

And now enthroned in Glory, he retains all the tender sympathy with childhood which characterized his earthly ministry. There is still the fresh and living consciousness of his own human infancy and childhood. In view of the mysterious union of the divine and human in Christ, that infantile state must be in a beautiful sense a perpetual state; so that he may be justly styled a divine child — an eternal child. He was thus viewed by the inspired apostles, as is manifest from Acts iv. 27–29. He is worshipped upon his throne of glory by Peter and John, as the *Holy Child* Jesus. How

intensely interesting is this aspect of the Saviour in his relations to childhood! Because even childhood is human, it must have sorrow; because it is human, it cannot have unmingled bliss. Children have their little mental and emotional struggles, and cares, and sorrows, which sometimes leave a transient shade of sadness on their brow, but which they cannot unfold even to a mother's bosom. How inexpressibly precious is the thought that Jesus is touched with a feeling of their little infirmities, which they have no language to express; that there is One who can catch the meaning of that shade of sadness on its sunny face, and interpret the meaning of its sighs, and who is touched with a quick, responsive sympathy, for he was once a little child, and is still the Holy Child Jesus.

There is something in this which has wonderfully affected the sympathies of mankind; it has endeared the Saviour to the minds of children, and invested his character with a transcendant beauty and loveliness to the pious of all ages. By a natural association in our minds, the "holy child Jesus" has left a halo of spiritual beauty and sanctity around the age of childhood. There seem yet to linger on the face and brow of little children the benedictive smile and hallowing touch of

Jesus, when he took such in his arms, and put his hands on them, and blessed them.

We leave with reluctance a theme upon which we should love still to linger; but we hope to renew this contemplation again, if not on earth, when we ourselves are fully transformed into the spiritual image of a little child, and shall bow down to worship the *Holy Child Jesus* in Heaven.

The transition from the subject of our thoughts in this chapter to the Little Children of the New Testament, is natural and pleasant; a theme next in loveliness to the one we leave. For who has not felt the

BEAUTY OF CHILDHOOD?

There is an indefinable charm to our hearts in a little child, in its pure, unsullied freshness, as if just coming from the hands of God. It is so in part, perhaps, from an unconscious association in our minds with the divine child, and partly from the pleasing recollections of our own childhood, so endeared to memory, and so attractive to the imagination.

There is something in a true unperverted childhood that is sweet and lovely. Wordsworth, in his "Inti-

mations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," says

"Heaven lies about us in our infancy!"

This is true as well as beautiful. A child seems embosomed in the Infinite, and among its first ideas is that of the boundless. "We awaken into life with a vague sense of its grandeur; we fancy that we can reach the sky which rests upon the mountain, but we soon find by experience in what a big world we are living. The stars seem near, and we think that we could grasp them, but soon we begin to suspect the vastness of the lighted dome, and then there dawn upon our faculties glimpses of the measureless universe of God." It is a time of beautiful illusions and fancies, of fresh sympathy with nature in its ever-varying beauty; and it is because they renew within us a consciousness of our own childhood, and with that consciousness our early love of nature, that they appear so lovely to our eyes.

"There was a time, when meadow, grove and stream,
The earth and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.

It is not now, as it hath been of yore;
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more."

How true is this in our experience! as our childhood departs, the charm which once invested all things to our youthful fancy, fades into the light of common day. We feel

"That there hath passed away a glory from the earth."

And I need scarcely say that there is a feeling of sadness in this experience; we seem to be removed farther from the heaven that surrounded our early years. There is something exceedingly simple and touching in those lines of Hood, in which this feeling of contrast is expressed:—

"I remember, I remember
The fir-trees dark and high,
I used to think their tiny tops
Were close against the sky;
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy,
To know I'm farther off from heaven
Than when I was a boy."

Little children throw around us the simplicity and beauty of our own youth, and thus give a kind of

mental permanence to our own childhood, and this makes them to us a source of perpetual pleasure; and we realize the sentiments of Wordsworth in the Ode from which we have just quoted:—

"O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction!"

Not for the delight and liberty, and simple creed of childhood; not for these only, says the Poet, did he raise his grateful song of praise—

"But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal silence; truths that wake,
To perish never."

But it is time we should pass to the pleasing and edifying pictures of the Little Children of the New Testament.

Chapter Second.

THE LITTLE CHILDREN BROUGHT TO THE SAVIOUR.

Blessed Jesus ever loved to trace
The innocent brightness of an infant's face;
He raised them in His holy arms,
He blessed them from the world and all its harms:
Heirs though they were of sin and shame,
He blessed them in *His* own and in *His* Father's name.—KEBLE.

"Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God."—JESUS.

BEAUTIFUL is this attitude of the Redeemer in his relations to children. Beautiful did it seem to Isaiah, as it passed before him in prophetic vision, eliciting that touching representation of the Good Shepherd imprinted on every pious heart: "He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom."

There is scarcely to be found in sacred history a more

lovely and significant emblem of Christianity than that presented in this attractive scene.

How has this moral picture of the Gospel, with the winning posture of the Redeemer inviting the approach of little children, lived in Christian memory as a "thing of beauty, and a joy forever!" And that utterance of affectionate welcome, "Suffer little children to come unto me," how has it lingered in the heart of parental love, like a sound of music from Heaven; and how, through successive generations, has it fallen on the opening heart and consciousness of childhood like the gentle dew upon the opening flowers of Spring!

There are some aspects in Nature which, once seen, abide in the soul forever. "No one ever forgets," says Hamilton, "an Alpine sunset, or a single star shining sweetly in a cloudy sky at night." And no one, with a susceptibility to what is beautiful in the moral and social aspects of life, can ever forget this Gospel picture. The Saviour, with an aspect so benignant, with arms opened to receive the little children and clasp them to his bosom with the exclamation "of such is the kingdom of Heaven," is a picture of moral beauty which, when received into the heart, abides there forever.

When we look at a painting of great artistic excellence and moral beauty — such as the Madonna of Raphael, or Allston's Jeremiah, or The Descent from the Cross, by Guerin, there is at the first glance a feeling of the beautiful — a delicate flush of pleasure over the soul; but as we gaze, new thoughts and suggestions are evolved. We seem to catch that rapt expression of greatful joy in the countenance of Mary; we seem to understand the meaning of that serene and thoughtful eye, as visions float before her of wonders and glories to be unveiled in the future. And a writer, describing the impression made upon his mind by The Descent from the Cross, by Guerin, in the Baltimore Cathedral, says: "It is so composed, so coloured, so filled with triumphant expression, that you feel as you gaze, that 'death is swallowed up in victory.'"

It is thus with this Gospel picture; the first glimpse of it sends a freshening glow of pleasure through the soul, as when gazing at some rural landscape in springtime, and we exclaim, "It is beautiful!"

But it is something more. As we protract our view of this touching scene, we experience something more than mere transient emotions of the beautiful. It is suggestive of truths of great practical interest

and importance. So that we may appropriately characterize this scene with truths placed in such beautiful relations as "apples of gold in pictures of silver."

This scene to a thoughtful mind is full of suggestions of great practical interest. The conduct of the disciples in their effort to intercept the approach of children to Christ, naturally suggests the inquiry whether we have never been guilty of similar interference, and thereby incurred the reprehension of Christ. Whilst the aspect and conduct of the Saviour in that shade of displeasure on his calm brow, as he repulsed the offensive interference, and the benignity with which he uttered that affectionate welcome of little children to his arms, are suggestive of encouraging thoughts; thoughts which, acting in the way of motives, may happily co-operate with the promptings of natural affection in leading parents to bring their children to the Saviour for his blessing.

The whole scope of its spiritual import will be evolved by a consecutive view of those who brought children to Christ, and those who interfered with their being brought; and the whole deportment of the Saviour towards these distinctive parties, together with his words

of welcome and comforting assurance, that "of such is the kingdom of God."

I. Of those who are here represented as bringing young children to Christ, we know nothing beyond the simple fact in the narrative. The most natural inference is, that they were the parents of the children; but whether they understood the full meaning of their own act, we do not know; whether it was the mere instinct of natural affection, prompting them to bring their children with some undefined hope of securing a blessing; or whether, having caught the spreading rumors of the Redeemer's fame, and of his gentle condescension to little children, taking them in his arms and blessing them, and were thus moved to bring their children for his benediction, we are unable to determine, in the absence of any detailed account in the Gospel narrative. But whatever may have been the feelings or motives prompting them in this procedure, the act itself received the most decisive sanction of the Redeemer, and stands immortalized in Gospel history as a sacred symbol of all that is beautiful in parental love, conducting their tender offspring to the Saviour of the world. It is thus preserved in sacred history as both an example and an encouragement to parents to bring

their children to Christ, with the assurance that their offering will meet with a like reception, and secure a similar blessing, for "*He* is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever."

II. The conduct of the disciples who "rebuked those that brought young children," is deserving of special notice.

Their conduct in the view of Christ was equivalent to a forbidding of little children to come to him. In the absence of scriptural data, we are incompetent to determine the precise form of this interference. Perhaps it was a look that frowned the little ones back, or a significant gesture of the hand, or a word of rebuke, or some compulsory act intercepting their progress, we know not. But whatever the specific form of their conduct, it was substantially a forbidding of little children to come to the Saviour, as is manifest from the consequent reprehension of the disciples by Christ, and his invitation, Suffer them to come, and forbid them not.

It may serve to quicken our interest in this fact to observe, that the persons censured as interdicting the access of little children to Christ, were his own disciples. If it had proceeded from the self-righteous Scribes

or Pharisees, or any of the unbelieving Jews who discarded the Messiahship of Jesus, there would be little to awaken our surprise, or to justify any further inquiry into the reason of their conduct; for it would be sufficiently obvious without such inquiry. But that his disciples, through some perversion of judgment, some misconception of his kingdom, or some sudden, erratic impulse of passion, should interpose, either directly or indirectly, in keeping young children from Christ, excites our wonder.

The fact awakens our attention, and excites inquiry into the probable reason or feelings that influenced them in this unexpected procedure. The inquiry is not only natural but important, in order that we may guard against anything in our sentiments and deportment that might admit of a similar construction, and be productive of results practically repelling the approach of little children to the Saviour.

The usual explanation of their conduct is that which refers it to a feeling of kindness for their Lord. Jesus "went about doing good," and was often weary and worn with the incessant demands upon his loving heart and toiling hands; and the disciples, from a natural sympathy, wished to spare him this addition to his

labours. They perhaps reasoned that if the practice of bringing little children to Christ, with the vague notion of receiving some blessing from him, should become universal, there would be no end to his toils and interruptions; and, with a view of arresting at once such a tendency, they impulsively interposed to prevent such a result.

Although this may be admitted as the proximate reason, there was, we conceive, something back of this; some ulterior feeling, in which we must expect to find the real cause of their conduct. They had but imperfect conceptions of Christ's spiritual kingdom, and the relations of children to that kingdom. Their ideas of that kingdom led them to infer that there was little or no use in this formal presentation of children to Christ for his blessing; and therefore it was a useless imposition upon his time and labors. It seems from the several accounts in the Gospel, that these children were not diseased, or blind, or deaf; for, in that event, we could scarcely conceive it possible that the disciples should present such an interference. Had these children been blind, or sick, or deaf, the disciples could not have objected to their presentation to Jesus, who opened the eyes of the blind with a touch, and healed

the sick with a word. It would have been so obviously within the appropriate sphere of his mission, that the disciples, so far from rebuking the parents, would have co-operated with them in bringing their children to the Great Physician. But what use could there be in bringing these sound and healthy children to the Saviour to receive his miraculous touch?

This view, we conceive, presents a satisfactory solution of this singular conduct of the disciples. They regarded these children as too young to receive any spiritual blessing; and, as they were not afflicted with any physical malady, this act of bringing them to the Saviour was, in their view, a mere idle form and superstitious ceremony. With these views of the case, they were prompted from feelings of kindness to their Lord to prevent this additional imposition of cares upon a life that was already burdened with sorrow and wearied with toil.

That the disciples erred, both in their views and conduct, in this instance, is evident from the Saviour's words and manner.

Assuming the explanation of the disciples' conduct just given, and it seems the only one that is wholly satisfactory, it is easy to see how we, though occupying

a somewhat different religious stand-point, may incur the Saviour's displeasure, by sentiments and deportment of like tendency and effect, though differing from theirs in form and expression.

If they were influenced in this interference by the impression that the children were too young to receive any spiritual blessing, and the act of the parents in bringing them, therefore an unwarranted obtrusion upon the time of their Lord; how easily may we, from mistaken views of early religious education, practically prevent little children from going to Christ.

If under the idea that the child is too young to receive religious instructions and impressions, we neglect the earliest religious consciousness of the child, and defer its moral culture until it is older and more susceptible, as we imagine, of religious truth, are we not virtually keeping that child from the Saviour? and that too under a delusion similar to that which influenced the conduct of the disciples.

It is of course a very delicate point to determine the precise time for the initial process of instruction and discipline, as it will vary in different children. But this position may be safely assumed, that as soon as there are indications of intelligent consciousness in the

child, and the exhibitions of evil tempers and passions, there should begin some mode of instruction intelligible to childhood; some check and control that will indicate to the young heart the right and the wrong exercise of its opening powers and affections. That this process of discipline may begin at a very early age, will appear obvious to those who notice how soon the instinctive power of affection is capable of being developed into conscious love under the sunny influence of a mother's smile. "The child's affection gets developed on the smallest scale at first. The mother's love tempts forth the son's; he loves the bosom that feeds him, the lips that caress, the person that loves. Soon the circle widens, and includes brothers and sisters, and familiar friends; then gradually enlarges more and more, the affections strengthening as their empire spreads." And just as the child is thus early taught to love, it may be simultaneously made the subject of the gentle and chastening discipline of love. And although this early discipline may not in itself be styled bringing the child to Christ, it is unquestionably a preparative to that end. Whatever tends in early life to check evil tempers, and subdue unholy passions, and exercise a proper control over the expanding

powers, and gives a right development to the budding affections, will subsequently facilitate the progress of the soul to him who is the truth and the life.

So that if we neglect this early discipline and control—if, either through a criminal indifference, or from the impression that the child is too young to be the subject of instruction and discipline, we omit the delicate nurture of the expanding mind and affections, it will be in effect, though not consciously, withholding the child from Christ.

Another way in which it is possible to commit the practical error of the disciples, and like them, incur the reprehension of Jesus, is the adoption of some other books in the place of the Bible, for the instruction of childhood. There seems to be a prevalent idea that the Bible is not exactly the book for a little child. It must have something simpler; books more specially adapted to its limited range of thought; "books of which the authors are wiser than inspired prophets and apostles, as knowing better how to make great truths acceptable and intelligible. They cannot trust God to bless his own word, but imagine that word unsuited to the capacities of children; and they seek for writers to dilute and simplify the word, ridding it of mysteries,

and adapting it to juvenile understandings. This is virtually withholding the children from Christ; it is requiring, with the disciples, that they grow older, and better able to understand the mission of the Saviour, before they come to him for his blessing."

This was not the idea of Eunice, in the education of her little son Timothy. She began his education with the Holy Scriptures—"not simplified versions or story-illustrations of the Bible, with the hard things left out, and the dark things made plain, but the Holy Scriptures." She believed that He who made the Bible, made the mind of her little child, and knew infinitely better how to adapt the one to the other than all the genius and tact of modern book-makers. And the practical result of her course is a demonstration of its wisdom. The inspired apostle says to Timothy, "from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." In which he not only gives his sanction to the method of instruction adopted by Timothy's mother, but asserts its happy tendency in the child by the practical result in the man.

Let us imitate this example of Eunice. Let us not reckon the child too young to be brought at once in

contact with the sublime yet simple truths of the Bible, and through them to the great Teacher. Let us trust God as best competent to furnish truth for the infant mind. He who has displayed such wisdom in the various and wonderful adaptations of Nature, cannot fail here. He who gives to the thirsty beetle its sparkling dewdrop, can give to the infant mind its needed truth and spiritual aliment. He who has so studiously cared for the one, will not overlook the other. It would be strange indeed, if the Father of Spirits could not teach the infant spirit in its incipient germinations, just as easily and beautifully as he tempers the rough wind to a zephyr to breathe upon the life of a violet; or if He could not cause his truth to descend upon the opening mind of childhood in as gentle distillations as the dews of morning upon the unfolding flowers of Spring.

Now we find in the Bible just this adaptation which analogical reasoning would lead us to expect. Whilst minds of the finest mould and most excursive thought find truths to instruct and interest, and heights which they cannot scale, and depths they are unable to fathom, leaving them ever to wonder and adore; there is yet with all this a simplicity that interests the minds

of children. It abounds in touching incidents and poetry, beautiful narratives, and biography and parables, such as cannot fail to be both attractive and instructive to the mind of a child. The parable of the Prodigal Son is so simple and touching in its structure and incident, as to seem especially intended to instruct and affect little children. This peculiarity of the Scriptures has struck all thoughtful minds. Barnes, speaking of this feature of adaptation in the Bible to youthful minds, says: "It is for reasons such as these that we suppose that the Christian system, with all that is great and profound in it, has continued to inweave into itself an arrangement contemplating the mind of a child."

It is true there are mysteries in the Bible, and the parent will often be perplexed by the curious and profound questionings of childhood. For children will propose difficulties suggested to their minds, which no theologist can answer. But let not such parts of the Bible be avoided and passed over because they do not admit of explanation. The Psalmist says, "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep." And in the study of the Bible we will come to these mountains and this ocean.

The idea in the mind of David, in the use of these natural emblems, was that of vastness and immensity in the perfections and judgments of the Almighty. And the true course in the instruction of a child is not to avoid them, but come right up to them; not to scale the one or measure the other, but to look up the majestic heights and out upon the vast deep, to wonder and adore. Say to the child at once that this is a mystery. Meet its questionings with the frank confessions of ignorance. For in most cases in the Bible, what is a mystery to a child is a mystery also to a man. The origin of Sin, the Incarnation, the Trinity, &c., are almost as much beyond the grasp of a Newton or Edwards, as the feeble thought of a child.

We should, therefore, begin at once with the Bible; and when we meet with what is mysterious, tell the child we are unable to explain it now, and that we receive it simply as a fact of God's word which transcends our present limited sphere of thought, and that we expect to understand more about it hereafter. This confession of ignorance to the child asking for reasons upon subjects which lie beyond the range of reason — this implicit submission of reason to revelation, will have a happy effect upon the subsequent experience of

the child when it is called to grapple with the great truths of Revelation. "If, after the fashion of many juvenile books, you strive to make intelligible what ought to be left mysterious, you do but nourish in the child the notion that he is competent to understand all truth, and prepare him for skepticism, if he finds himself in riper years called upon to submit his reason to his faith. Whereas, if you begin at once what he must come to at last, the reception of truth, because God hath said it, though man cannot explain it, you do the best to cherish in him a reverence for the majesty of Scripture — to train him up in those habits of mental submission; the want of which so frequently makes the skeptic—the presence of which is indispensable to the believer."

Whilst, therefore, we are not to discard the subsidiary helps of the many excellent juvenile works, the Bible must be the great text-book in the religious education of the child. We must begin, progress, and end with the Bible.

Now in both of the ways mentioned we may virtually imitate the example of the disciples, by omitting the earliest practicable period for beginning the religious education of the child, and the substitution of other

books in the place of the Bible, under the mistaken idea that it is too young for either the one or the other.

In regard to the former, it must be obvious that, as the child is born in sin, and its first tendencies will be to evil, its religious education should begin with the first gleams of intelligent consciousness.

We are so accustomed to the poetical representations of the beauty and innocence of childhood, that we almost forget the latent evil that lies slumbering beneath the fair and winning exterior. We forget that the germs of all that is revolting in the monster of iniquity may lie folded behind faces of almost cherubic beauty. And although in early infancy there may be little that is symptomatic of that moral virus which taints our humanity, still we know that it is in the child — that it is yet in embryo, but will manifest itself in a sinful development with the expansion of its mind and moral nature. The very pirate that crimsons the ocean wave with the blood of his defenceless victim in some lonely sea, was once a little child, the object of parental love and domestic endearment. The condemned criminal doomed to death, was once an infant, resting its head upon a mother's bosom, smiling as the very incarnation of beauty.

With this assumption of the child's inherent depravity, it is obvious that its religious education should begin at the earliest possible period; and that this process of education should be begun and prosecuted under the divine teachings of the Bible. This Divine book should not be displaced by the substitution of other books professing to simplify and render attractive the truths of Scripture, as though the Bible could not be made intelligible and interesting to children. We should feel assured that there is no posture ever for a child more appropriate than that of Mary at the feet of Jesus, hearing the words of the Master himself. "His words, and those which his spirit inspired, are far more likely to reach and work upon the heart of a child — his words in their own majesty, ay, and mystery—than when pared down, and paraphrased, and simplified by processes of modern book-making."

Now if we neglect the earliest season for beginning the process of religious instruction and discipline, or if we discard the Bible and resort to other sources of instruction, under the idea that the child is too young to be brought directly to Christ, we virtually repeat the very conduct of the disciples, who rebuked those that brought children to the Saviour, and like them cannot fail to incur the displeasure of our Lord.

III. The manner in which the Saviour rebuked the interference of the disciples, serves to illustrate more fully the points under consideration.

The conduct of the disciples was exceedingly offensive to Jesus. "He was much displeased." The original is expressive of great indignation. No word could indicate more strongly the deep abhorrence of the Saviour to such interference with those who were conducting the little children to him. It serves to present this subject in a very solemn light, when we consider "that in a life of constant encounter with evil, of opposition from enemies, of desertion by friends, our Lord should have been only once known to be much displeased, and that once in the scene before us. It presents this subject in the most solemn and startling light; that in all the life of the meek and lowly Redeemer, we never find him much displeased but once; and that one outburst of unmixed indignation and displeasure was when they would prevent those who brought little children to him."

The fact itself is sufficiently startling to arrest the serious and prayerful attention of every parent.

The language of the Saviour, you perceive, refers not so much to the positive duty of bringing the little chil-

dren to him, as to the avoidance of what might prove an obstruction in their way, and the removal of every impediment over which their little feet might stumble.

The expression "suffer" them to come, involves the idea that they would go to the Saviour if they were not hindered; and it is easy to see how we may unconsciously prevent little children in their first attractions to Christ. How early may a child feel its heart gravitating to Him who is the Light and Life of the world! Drawn perhaps by the story of his life, so simple and beautiful, or the touching scenes of the garden and the cross, that have often won the sympathy of childhood! How possible for a little child, made familiar with the Gospel story, under the influence of the Divine Spirit, to feel sweetly attracted to the Saviour! And how easily may such a tendency be counteracted by coldness and indifference, by a neglect to foster the first germs of religious thought and feeling! Children are remarkably quick in their perception of character, and if they see a bad example in their parents, whom they are naturally disposed to regard as models of all excellencies, and in whom they so affectionately confide, they are embarrassed and discouraged; all their notions of religion are confused, and consequently inoperative.

If they are surrounded with an atmosphere of worldliness and irreligion, with no gentle words of direction and encouragement and prayer, how inevitably will such a state of things extinguish the first dawnings of divine light in the soul, and chill the first pulsations of spiritual love in the heart!

If by our example or our neglect, or in any way, we interfere with the first attraction of the young heart to the Saviour, or if by the omission of such aids and positive influences as it needs in that important crisis, we do not encourage and facilitate its progress to Christ, we virtually repeat the very conduct of the disciples in this scene; we may be justly charged with not suffering it to go. And what parental heart does not instinctively shrink from the very thought of keeping a little child from the Saviour?

The other form of expression, "Forbid them not," may indicate a more direct and positive influence. If, instead of fostering and encouraging the early religious impressions and tendencies of childhood, there is adopted a course of education and life for the child that is hostile to religion, that tends to divert the mind from serious things, and check the first outgushing of the young heart after Christ, this would be practi-

cally forbidding the children to go to the inviting Saviour.

Sometimes the whole spirit and economy of the domestic life, the very atmosphere of home, is such as effectually to exclude all thoughts of Christ, and all sense of the paramount claims of religion. The amusements, the plans, the conversation, are all worldly. The child detects in the parents a greater concern for its smartness or graceful accomplishments, than for any manifestations of piety. The impression made upon its mind is, that religion is not the one thing needful; that there are other things in the estimation of the parents that are of prior and more imperative claims than going to Christ: and the practical tendency is a forbidding it to go; for in effect it is essentially the same, "whether the child be told not to come to Christ at all, or whether he be told to go to some one else first."

It is a serious charge to prefer against even Christian parents, that they will not "suffer little children"—that they "forbid them"—to go to the Saviour; and yet it may be as true as it is sad and affecting.

When we consider the many hindrances that are put in the way of children—the many obstructions that are

not removed from their path—when we see in many a professedly Christian home the predominance of a worldly spirit and worldly associations, and the neglect of direct efforts for the salvation of the little children—it is by no means an unwarranted or uncharitable inference, "that many who imagine they are bringing their children to Christ may not be suffering them to go; and some who are ostensibly urging them to go, may be all the while forbidding them."

Let me plead for the "little ones" that would go to Christ if they were not hindered; if they were encouraged and assisted. And with whom shall we urge our plea, if not with Christian parents? Think of the sacred and responsible relation you sustain to your children; that they have been entrusted to you, with the divine charge, "Take this child away and nurse it for me;" think how confidingly they look to you for direction and safety, and how certainly it is your office to give to their expanding minds and budding affections a Christ-ward and heaven-ward direction. Look upon them, in all their confiding simplicity and love, and betray not their innocent trust.

See on the one hand the blessed Saviour, in the lovely and attractive attitude of this scene, with open

arms, and the affectionate welcome, saying, "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not;" and on the other your little ones, with hearts gently drawn and ready to rush to the open arms of the Redeemer: and can you forbid them? Can you hinder them? No; every instinct of natural affection—every sense of religious obligation — prompts the emphatic response, Never! And every parental heart with an instinctive repulsion of the thought, echoes, Never, no never!

Then do not practically what in thought you repudiate with such unmingled abhorrence. Do not, by an irreligious example, or by your neglect of appropriate and timely instruction, or by restraining prayer before God, prevent the little ones from going to Christ. By all the love you bear them — by all your love for the Saviour — by all that is stirring in the spiritual destiny of your children — and by all that is fearful in the retributions of Eternity — suffer them to go and forbid them not. For, "whosoever shall offend one of these *little ones* which believe in me, it were better that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the midst of the sea."*

* The mention of faith in the little ones shows, that the childlike believer is primarily intended. But the inference is inevitable that

How solemn is the appeal of this subject to irreligious parents! If you live in the neglect of religion, with no obvious concern for the soul, with no public profession of Christ as your Lord and Saviour, what can you expect from your children? You would not perhaps by any formal act interdict religion to your loved ones; you may even express a wish for their piety; but how can a child feel the importance of piety with the influence of an irreligious father and a prayerless mother before it? Are you not practically keeping your children from Christ? virtually forbidding them to go? Perhaps that young heart felt the gentle drawings of a Saviour's love, and under the touches of the Divine Spirit was ready to go to Jesus; but that first tendency was checked; that first throbbing of the heart chilled, and the youthful spirit repulsed; and that by a father or a mother, who would not suffer it to go to Jesus. O! rather bare your bosom to the lightnings of heaven,

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the regard of the Saviour for the little children, to whom he compares the humble believer, cannot be less than for the believer himself. And, for obvious reasons, the giving offence to a little child, causing it to stumble, must be an act of greater turpitude than a similar offence committed against an adult believer. So that the passage, in all its solemn import, is applicable to those who literally offend one of these little ones.

than stand in the way of a little child, and frown it back from the inviting arms of the Saviour!

I know that, loving your children as you do, you recoil from such an interference. You would not, for the world, wilfully imperil the salvation of your child. But, in your own practical neglect of religion, you are, however unconsciously, keeping that child from Christ. Look round upon your Christless and prayerless home, and the little ones that cluster around you so lovingly and confidingly, and can you betray their innocent trust and affection? O, if no other plea can prevail—if no other "argument can draw you to God," look into the face of your little ones, "and let these dear living arguments come into your soul and prevail there."

Chapter Third.

THE CHILDREN IN THE TEMPLE.

"And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David, they were sore displeased."—MATTHEW.

"Then waken into sound divine
The very pavement of thy shrine,
Till we, like Heaven's star-sprinkled floor,
Faintly give back what we adore.
Child-like though the voices be,
And untunable the parts,
Thou wilt own the minstrelsy,
If it flow from child-like hearts."—KEBLE.

THIS chant of youthful voices in the temple was a beautiful tribute from children to their Infinite Friend. It was meet that children, so richly blessed in the Saviour's mission, should bear a part in his triumph, and help to swell the praises of Zion's King. And

grateful must it have been to the Man of sorrows to be thus cheered by the sweet songs of childhood, in the near prospect of Gethsemane and the Cross.

The hosanna of the children in the Temple is a touching and significant prelude to the sublime and tragical death-scene of Calvary. But it is not simply as an affecting incident in the history of the Saviour that this temple scene claims our attention, but as suggestive of important reflections upon the early religious instruction of children.

We are not informed in the narrative how these children happened to be in the temple at this particular time; whether they had been attracted by the multitude and the unusual circumstances of the occasion, or conducted thither by their pious parents. Nor are we informed of the feelings which prompted their "Hosanna to the Son of David;" whether it was from a sympathetic enthusiasm inspired by the shouts of the multitude, or a supernatural impulse imparted to them at the moment, or, what is perhaps the most reasonable conjecture, that it proceeded from both of these sources, combined with some idea of the Messiah which they had derived from their parents.

But whatever may have been the immediate occasion

of this acclamation from the children, it is obvious that their hosanna was not a childish imitation of the multitude — a mere echo of the shout in the streets. If it had been merely such a senseless repetition, the Saviour would not have received it as a grateful tribute to himself, and referred to the passage in the Psalms to explain and justify it. Nor would such a childish imitation have awakened the fears and displeasure of the priests and scribes. They were manifestly greatly annoyed by this juvenile demonstration of joy. They appealed to Christ in the tones of complaint and censure, as if he ought to check those gushing shouts of the children that were sounding through the temple. "Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?"

A careful analysis of the feelings and apprehensions of these scribes, awakened by the hosanna of the children, and the Scriptural quotation adduced by the Saviour as explanatory of their youthful praises, furnish a most striking testimonial to the power of early religious education, and the important instrumentality of children in the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom.

I. We read that "when the Chief Priests and Scribes saw the wonderful things which Jesus did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosannah to the Son of David! they were sore displeased." The original is expressive of great indignation. Now there must have been something in their view of those temple-hosannas beyond a mere childish imitation or sympathetic enthusiasm, to excite in their minds such deep feelings of indignation. And why should they be so much displeased with the *children*, (as a distinguished writer has suggested,) whilst they take no notice of the shouts of the multitude in the streets?

If their feelings of displeasure originated, as it is presumed, from indications of the progress of Christ's kingdom, was there not more to be apprehended from the shouts of the populace that rent the air than from the unconscious anthems of childhood? In their view it would seem *not*. On the assumption that those children had some true idea of Christ, and that their hosanna was a genuine outflow of their devotion, the writer* above referred to gives the following solution

* Melvill. — We have adopted the current idea of this author, though not in every instance the phraseology, except when marked as quotation.

of the feelings of displeasure exhibited by the Chief Priests and Scribes, why they saw more to alarm them in the hymning of the children than in the acclamations of the multitude. They knew the fickleness of the multitude, and how soon this popular ebullition might pass away as the morning dew, or be changed into the very opposite feelings; so that the very throng which to-day shouted "Hosanna," might to-morrow join in the cry of "*Crucify him.*" But they did not so regard the convictions and inwrought impressions of the children; they did not seem so likely to be fitful and evanescent; there was *something* in this hold of Christ upon the youthful affections, which to their fears was prophetic of the triumph of his cause; they knew the tenacity of early convictions, and the permanency of youthful impressions, and therefore their far-reaching sagacity foreshadowed these infantile enthusiasts into the faithful adherents and marshalled hosts of the Son of God.

This is, therefore, a remarkable concession, yet *unconsciously* offered, on the part of the enemies of Christ, to the *power* of early religious impressions and training. Blinded as they were to Christianity, they were, as politicians, sufficiently sagacious, and could discern

the probable bearings of these juvenile hosannas upon the future spread and establishment of Christ's kingdom; so that their conduct upon this occasion is indicative of their conviction "that the hymn lisped by the infant is likely to be woven into the creed of the man." And although we have no historic data to prove that the children who shouted hosanna in the temple became in mature life the disciples of Christ, it is obvious that the probability that such would be the result, was felt by these Scribes, and that this was the apprehension which awakened their displeasure; so that this scene furnishes a most striking testimonial to the powerful influence of early religious education. It is a concession wrung from the fears of sagacious politicians, that our highest expectation of diffusing Christianity rests in training up the rising generation in the fear of God, and in the love and obedience of the Gospel.

"And this conviction has universally obtained among philanthropists and Christians. There always has been, and there yet is, a consciousness, that if a thorough hold be gotten of the childhood of a country, the greatest possible advantage will be gained for the diffusion and maintenance of any doctrine; and accord-

ingly, whilst those who have most at heart the Christianity of a people are for covering a land with schools, the instruction of which shall draw its staple from the Bible, those who would make Christianity secondary, or banish it altogether, are for establishing institutions in which the young shall be trained, but not in the peculiar tenets which "make wise unto salvation." In both cases, the persuasion is practically the same, that the system of national education determines in a great measure the form and features of national character."

No formal argument for the religious education of children could place it in a stronger light, than the apprehensions awakened in the minds of these chief priests, upon hearing the hosannas of the children in the temple.

And we should be led to more direct and persevering efforts in view of this fact, to secure this mighty auxiliary, in the triumphs of Christianity — by efforts in our own family — by Sabbath schools, and in every practicable way, contributing our influence, our means, and other personal endeavours, to rear the children of our country in the principles of the Bible, assured that in no other way can we so effectually and permanently advance the ultimate success of every

moral reform, and elevate our nation and our race in the principles of virtue and religion.

This important aspect of the temple scene is confirmed by the response of the Saviour to the complaint of these querulous priests and scribes.

II. The answer of Jesus was adapted to increase the fears of these opponents of his Kingdom, and to stimulate the efforts and the hopes of all true Christians in the work of rearing the young mind for Christ and Heaven.

This great and infallible Teacher refers them to their own Scriptures, for the solution and vindication of what had excited their displeasure — "Yea, have ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, thou hast perfected praise?"

The quotation expresses the Saviour's approval of what the scribes thought reprehensible. It is a beautiful tribute to the acceptableness of such infant hymnings of his praise, and ought to be a most persuasive incentive to parents, to rear their little ones to lisp his name and sing his love. "The proud and unholy might look with anger and contempt on the young Christians, as they lisped their hosannas; but the gracious Redeemer, who had taken children in his arms,

put his hands on them and blessed them, regarded with complacency the very babes who were taught his name, and listened to their praises as to an anthem in which his soul had delight."

The quotation of the Saviour, moreover, was adapted to confirm the opinion expressed in the fears of the priests and scribes, as to the probable influence of the rising generation in the furtherance of the Messiah's kingdom. They seemed to have more apprehensions from the hymns of the children in the temple, than from the shouts of the multitude in the streets. And the quotation was adapted to justify their fears, that from the young, instructed in the doctrines of his Cross, his Kingdom would receive its largest accessions and mightiest champions.

This interpretation of the passage gives confirmation to the idea which we extract from it, that both from the fears of these Jews, and in the views of the Saviour himself, *there is* a mighty power in the religious education of children to vindicate the claims of religion in the eyes of the world, and a mighty instrumentality for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom in the earth.

There are two ways in which such an instrumental-

ity may be, and is wielded by the religious culture of children. They have in manifold instances been directly instrumental in conveying religious truth to the heart and conscience of the careless and unbelieving. There is in religious truth, when uttered by childhood, a simplicity and a touching pathos, that finds its way to hearts that are inaccessible by any other means. Indurated beyond hope must be the heart that *can* resist the pleadings of infancy. Often, when every other entreaty has failed, when the minister and the friend have been repelled with obstinate pertinacity, has the heart been touched and moved by the lisping accents of a Saviour's love, and the "Hosannas" simply repeated by the very nurslings of the flock. Many a Sunday-School scholar, with its mind stored with the truths and texts of the Bible, has carried the Gospel to homes unblessed with religion. And many a child, as it has sung its infant-school hymns, and talked of Jesus in a home where in all its forms and sounds religion was a stranger, has awakened thoughts, and feelings, and memories in the hearts of irreligious parents, which have been blessed by God to their salvation.

Many well-authenticated facts, as well as some that

have come under our own observation, might be adduced, as practical illustrations of this point. For such anecdotal incidents, the reader is referred to the chapter on the Mission of Little Children.

In imbuing the minds of children with the truths of the Gospel, and touching their hearts with a Saviour's love, we may be equipping the most efficient missionaries to carry the story of the Cross, in all its touching simplicity, to many a hardened heart, and many a Christless home.

Again, children early taught to lisp hosannas in the temple, early trained in the knowledge and love of Christ, are more likely to retain their first religious impressions, to grow up Christians, and become the firm adherents of Christ and his cause. This seems to have been the ground of these priestly apprehensions. There was not so much alarm felt at the vociferous acclamations of the multitude in the streets, inasmuch as that might subside as a momentary ebullition; but the hymnings of the children, that was not likely to prove evanescent. They reckoned that if the young were taught to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, there were strong reasons to fear they would grow up his disciples, become his devoted adherents, and the most

effectual promoters of his cause. And was not the view taken justified by the answer of the Saviour? and do not facts universally confirm the opinion that there is wonderful power in the religious education of the young; and that the most effectual way of advancing the cause of truth and righteousness, is to guide the rising generation in the love of truth, and in the practice of righteousness?

Facts well accredited, show that this is no dream of the fancy, or idle speculation. The immortal Raikes, at his death, had the satisfactory intelligence, that of the 4000 children, reared in the Sabbath School, but one had been charged with any crime. The Chaplain of the State Prison, N. York, stated in 1829, that of the 500 convicts, not one had for any length of time been under the influence or instruction of the Sabbath School. Numerous statistical facts of a similar description are in our possession, illustrative of the Scripture promise, annexed to such religious training of childhood. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

Similar results have been realized, in the accessions to the Church. The sainted Milnor, when in attendance at one of the Sabbath School anniversaries in

London, stated, that in five years, 9755 Sunday School teachers, and scholars, in the United States, made a profession of religion, of which far the greater number was from the youth. The A. S. U., some years ago, reported that 30,000 children from the various Sabbath Schools, had united with the Church of Christ.

Thus, facts of unquestionable authenticity show that, by the religious education of Children, the Church has received her largest accessions, virtue its most numerous and consistent adherents, and religion its most successful advocates.

An examination of our Theological Seminaries would furnish evidence of the same practical result. The greater proportion of those who are preparing for the ministry, were the children of pious parents, or received early religious training in the Sabbath School. There is in Philadelphia, a Lutheran Church, whose Sabbath School has now six men in the gospel ministry. Some years ago, the students of one of our schools of the prophets, made the inquiry, how many among their number were the sons of pious parents, and had received their first religious impressions in childhood; and the result of the examination was that four-fifths of them could trace their first religious impressions to

the lessons and hymns of the nursery, and the prayers of pious mothers.

Thus viewing this temple-scene, in the light of illustrative facts, we are encouraged and quickened in the work of training the young to shout Hosanna to the Son of David.

We derive a stimulus both from the fears and murmurs of the scribes, and the answer of the Saviour that, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God has perfected praise." For, "both alike testified that to train the young in Christian principles, is to secure for those principles advancement and ascendency."

Let us fully realize the mighty power that may be wielded for Christ's kingdom, in the rearing of the rising generation — in the knowledge and love of the Saviour. Let it be the first great object of those occupying the responsible relation of parents, to "bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;" that their sons may be as plants grown up in their youth, and their daughters as corner-stones polished after the similitude of a palace. Ps. cxliv. 12.

And as philanthropists and Christians, let us aid in the benevolent work of Sabbath Schools, the great and distinctive object of which is to bring the children to

Christ, that they may receive his blessing, and learn to praise him in the temple, assured that we can in no other way so effectually advance the cause of virtue and extend the kingdom of Christ, as by prayerful and persevering and combined activity in this direction of benevolent effort.

And how inspiriting to Christian hope is the thought, that in this land every Sabbath 300,000 Teachers are engaged in imparting religious instruction to the young, and that on every Sabbath more than two millions of children are singing hosannas in the temples of the true and living God!

How has that little group of children in the Temple at Jerusalem enlarged its numbers, what millions have caught up and prolonged that infant Hallelujah, until it is beginning to roll like the sound of many waters! And how does the vision open beautifully and majestically in the future, when the whole earth shall be one vast temple, and from myriads of children, and those like children, shall roll round the earth and swell up to heaven, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ."

Let us rightly understand the lessons of this temple-

scene, and catch the inspiration of those infant hymns. We have not seen as we ought the instrumental connection of little children with the coming of Christ's kingdom. We have almost lost sight of the little ones in our vast schemes and sublime operations for the conversion of the world. We have thought more of the multitude shouting in the streets, than the sweet hosannas of children in the temple. The priests and scribes were wiser and more far-seeing than we; for they saw more significant indications of Christ's advancing kingdom in the simple hymns of the children than in all the boisterous acclamations of the adult multitude. Let us learn from our enemies; let us look to the children as among the mightiest instrumentalities for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom. "Of such," said Jesus, "is the kingdom of heaven," as though he would say to his misconceiving friends, "My kingdom is not one which it requires armed force, banded hosts of men to establish; little children are to set it up; if they can be enlisted in my cause, my throne is reared in all the earth." "Suffer them to come unto me, instil into their minds my doctrines, cultivate in their forming hearts my affections, and they shall maintain my kingdom; they shall bear it on

their young shoulders, grasp it with their tender hands, and move it forward with their fresh strength to endless advancement."

We conclude this chapter with the inspiriting thoughts and words of an eloquent writer.*

"With solemn joy I hark to the marshalling of this great troop, mightier than all the noisy hosts of the camp and the bloody plain. Their tread, far off and near by, grows year by year wider and more audible. Their van is in the midst of us. Parents and teachers are divinely appointed to the lead of the vast company. Tyrants and oppressors, all sinners and corrupters of human virtue, tremble at their coming. At the trumpet blown by their youthful voices, the walls of every evil institution shall fall down. Quiet, and without violence, as the light of the morning, is their advance; but powerful, all-pervading, and creative, as the sun in heaven, their influence. I see them banding, I hear them approaching, as the very kingdom of heaven. Those old words of Jesus ring out more arousing than any clarion upon my ear. From the little audience gathered on that further side of Jordan, they come as melody softly loud to the great Captain's host, but, like

* Bartol.

the music in a march of attack, dreadful to his foes. The gentle voice of him who first uttered them, mustering those that fight with no carnal weapons, waxes into a call with which the martial instruments of all nations cannot vie. The Commander's speech passes down to every one in the conduct under him, till it reaches the youngest follower in all his ranks. At the pervading sound a decisive movement runs through the whole array advancing together. No reeling step is seen, no clanking chain or scourging whip is heard. Only forward to the victories of peace and love the children of a new-born race, a noble army, go. God speed them! and God help us to speed them on their way!"

Chapter Fourth.

TIMOTHY.

"And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures."—PAUL.

Hold the little hands in prayer——
Let him see thee speaking to thy God: he will not forget it afterwards;
When old and gray, will he feelingly remember a mother's tender piety.
TUPPER.

TIMOTHY cannot properly be associated with the children of the New Testament, except in imagination; but the allusion of the apostle to the religious instruction of his childhood, with an obvious intimation that the "child was father of the man," authorizes his introduction here, as a practical illustration of the sentiments we have advanced and endeavored to enforce in the preceding chapters; and the reference that is made to his mother, whose piety infolded lovingly the spirit of her child, inbreathing into it her own spiritual life,

and bathing its young heart with the love of God, suggests the importance of piety and prayer as essential elements of power in the mother, giving efficiency to her instructions, and success in moulding the plastic child into the Christian man.

The two allusions of the Apostle give us the requisites in the religious education of the child. "And from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures." 2 Tim. iii. 15. The unfeigned faith that is in thee, that dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded in thee also." In these two references we have instruction and example combined in the education of Timothy. There is something in the latter reference that seems to favor Bushnell's theory of the "organic unity of the family;" according to this idea, the child is morally connected with the parents — a kind of rudimental being, that is to grow up in their life — the parents transfusing as it were, their own spirit and moral life into the child.* Whilst we might feel some reluctance in the adoption of his theory, in its essential idea of organic unity, there is much that commends itself to our minds as both reasonable and in harmony with the teachings of Scripture. And I

* See Bushnell on Christian Nurture.

am sure that it would have been more profitable for the Church to have improved by his important suggestions on Christian nurture, than to raise the cry of heresy. There is important truth in his position, that there exists a spiritual vital union between the parent and the child, and that under the influence of a spirit and an example of piety, we are authorized to expect the "child to grow up a Christian." This is not original with him, but as he says is as old as the Christian Church. In the allusion of Paul, "the faith that is in thee which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois and thy mother Eunice," there is something that seems like a transmission of piety from the one to the other; "the Apostle conceives a power in the good life of their mothers, that must needs transmit some flavor of piety."

But, apart from his theory, no one questions the existence of piety in the parent as essential to the religious education of the child. "Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," "a form of expression," says Bushnell, "which indicates the existence of a divine nurture that is to encompass the child and mould him unto God; so that he shall be brought up, as it were, in Him."

We present Eunice, in her efforts by precept and example, to bring up her child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, as an example for the imitation of all mothers; and we present Timothy as an illustration of what, under the blessing of God, they may reasonably expect as the practical result of such imitation.

Every mother should regard it as practicable to rear her child a Christian. Taking the ductile mind and impressible nature of her little one, surrounding it with an atmosphere of love, infusing into its forming heart the spirit of piety, and instilling into its opening mind the truths of the Gospel, she should seek, under the divine blessing, to nurture it into the Christian child, to be developed into the Christian man.

It is true there may be hostile influences sometimes counteracting this pious nurture, and disappointing us in the practical result; but this should not interfere with a faithful discharge of parental duty, in the hope that a "child trained up in the way he should go will not depart from it when he is old." Let the child be instructed in the knowledge of God, and the Saviour, and spiritual things, encompassing its early years with a pious example and every Christian influence, and

then in prayer commend the result to God. As a quaint preacher once said, "Fill the water-pots with water, and Christ may turn it into wine."

As the early religious instruction of childhood has been specially considered in a previous chapter, nothing more seems needed than the encouragement and stimulus afforded to mothers in the example of Eunice, whose pious efforts in behalf of her child were so richly rewarded in the Christian man, Timothy.

Like this mother, begin early the process of religious education. Be assured, that whatever progress the world has made since then, the religious growth of a child is still the same. The child has to start from the cradle and grow out of it, just as Timothy did. Religious character is now, as then, a growth. With all modern improvements in the application of steam and electricity for the speedier transmission of our bodies and our thoughts from city to city, the old law of progress and development in the natural and spiritual world remains unchanged. The passage from the germ to the blossom, from infancy to manhood, from ignorance to wisdom, still goes, and must go, by the old slow method of growth and development. The flower does not spring up full-grown; it rises from the germ

by a development and an increase noiseless and gentle. So, said the Saviour, is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and the seed should spring up and grow, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. Mark iv. 26–29.

This was the process of religious growth and development in the case of Timothy. It began in his infancy on the bosom of his mother.

Among the first things to be done by the believing mother for her child, is its presentation to Christ in

BAPTISM.

It would not comport with the current spirit and tone of this book to notice the polemical aspect of infant baptism. It would be out of taste, and of questionable utility. Believing that the Christian dispensation is only a continuation, a fuller development of the Jewish; the same church expanded into a nobler form;* we expect a parallel between circumcision and baptism as initiatory rites in the two dispensations. If infants, by the express direction of God, were admitted

* Kip, Double Witness of the Church, Section II.

by circumcision into the Jewish church, why may they not now be received into the Christian fold by baptism? The church is essentially the same in all ages, and the ancient promise is still made "to us and our children."

I cannot forbear quoting here the remarks of Bushnell, showing the relation of his theory of organic unity to infant baptism. "The child is too young to choose the rite for himself; but the parent, having him as it were in his own life, is allowed the confidence that his own faith and character will be reproduced in the child, and grow up in his growth; and that thus the propriety of the rite as a seal of faith will not be violated. In giving us this rite on the grounds stated, God promises, in fact, on his part to dispense that spiritual grace which is necessary to the fulfilment of its import. In this way, too, it is seen that the Christian economy has a place for all ages; for it would be singular if, after all we say of the universality of God's mercy as a gift to the human race, it could yet not limber itself to man, so as to adopt a place for the age of childhood, but must leave a full fourth part of the race, the part least hardened in evil and tenderest to good, unrecognized and unprovided for; gathering a flock without lambs, or, I should rather say, gathering

a flock away from the lambs. Such is not the spirit of Him who said, "Forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven." Therefore we bring them into the school of Christ, and the pale of his mercy with us, there to be trained up in the holy nurture of the Lord."

Every act of Christ in relation to children, and his repeated declaration that "of such is the kingdom of Heaven," justifies the conclusion that he would not bid the little ones stand without the sacred fold. Such an exclusion of little children from the grace and blessings of his church would be utterly inconsonant with his whole character—a deportment so expressive of tenderness and affection for children, as well as irreconcileable with the prophetic representation of the Messiah as the Good Shepherd, who should "gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom."

It would be strange indeed, if, in a "scheme of mercy" for the world, the Saviour had found no place for infants and little children. Strange if the parents should be included in the holy communion of the Church, whilst the innocent little ones should be left without the fold, without the imparted grace and the Christian nurture of the Church. The idea is inadmis-

sible; we fondly clasp to our hearts the cherished doctrine of infant baptism as taught in our church, founded, as we believe, in the word of God.

"Of the two great ideas of our religion, Holiness and Love, one stands behind the Lord's table, and the other guards the baptismal font. It is, then, no slight thing when you offer your child to take this sign which led on Judaism to Christianity. It is a consecration to the Lord.*

Let no speculative difficulties keep you from this consecration of your child to God. Do not, like the disciples, keep your child from Christ, under the idea it is too young to believe—too young to receive the grace and blessing of Christ. Who can positively affirm that a child is incapable of faith? What do we know of the capabilities of a child's mind? A child has faith in its mother; why may it not exercise belief in Jesus? The child reposes in its mother's arms with as much confiding security as the philosopher rests in the laws of the universe. Why may it not rest as confidingly in the arms of Jesus? There is no psychological absurdity in the idea of a child having faith; and all the assertions to the contrary are wholly gratuitous and founded in ignorant assumptions.

* Bartol.

"I do not hold," said Luther, "that children are without faith when they are baptized; for, inasmuch as they are brought to Christ by his command, and that the church prayeth for them, therefore, without all doubt, faith is given unto them, although with our natural sense and reason we neither see nor understand it."*

Nor can any one deny that a child may be the subject of divine influence; that there may be an agency of the Holy Spirit adapted to an infant's mind.

But, dismissing all speculations upon this point, it should be enough for the parents to know that they are invited to bring the child, and devote it to the Lord in holy baptism; and that, by that solemn rite, it becomes a member of the church of Christ, and the subject of divine grace. It is a pledge of acceptance, securing for the child the gift of the Holy Ghost; and thus received into a covenant relation to each of the three persons in whose one name they are baptized, "acceptance by the Father, union with Christ, and the Communion of the Holy Ghost."

This we conceive is one of the first duties of a parent to the child. Before it is susceptible of any influence

* Coleridge's Literary Remains.

or instruction from the mother, let it be brought to the baptismal font, placed under the gentle stream falling from the skies, whose mild outpouring is ordained of God to purify and bless the child. Bring your little one first to Christ, to be infolded in his love, and gathered as a lamb to his flock. What spectacle more lovely than the sight of a Christian mother bringing her unconscious child and consecrating it forever to the Lord! This scene, as one of spiritual beauty, in its significance and after-blessedness, is so touchingly presented by Willis, that we cannot close more happily than by its insertion.

"She stood up in the meekness of a heart
Resting on God, and held her fair young child
Upon her bosom, with its gentle eyes
Folded in sleep, as if its soul had gone
To whisper the baptismal vow in heaven.
The prayer went up devoutly, and the lips
Of the good man glow'd fervently with faith
That it would be even as he had pray'd,
And the sweet child be gather'd to the fold
Of Jesus. As the holy words went on
Her lips moved silently, and tears, fast tears,
Stole from beneath her lashes, and upon
The forehead of the beautiful child lay soft
With the baptismal water. Then I thought
That to the eye of God, that mother's tears

> Would be a deeper covenant — which sin
> And the temptations of the world, and death
> Would leave unbroken — and that she would know
> In the clear light of heaven, how very strong
> The prayer which press'd them from her heart had been
> In leading its young spirit up to God.

Having made the consecration, be careful that as its mind unfolds into intelligent consciousness there be nothing to check its spiritual growth; be careful that all the words and looks and smiles around that child be the effusion of Christian love; that there be no evil tempers and passions, or any manifestation of sin, to soil its spirit. For whilst the flowers of earth drink in sweetness only from "every air that stirs,"

> ——————————"the child
> That shuts within its breast a bloom for heaven,
> May take a blemish from the breath of love,
> And bear the blight forever.

As soon as it is susceptible of religious instruction, instil into its mind the simple truths of the Gospel, and infuse into its heart your own spirit of faith and love and prayer; and "live the better life into the child. Let the child grow up in your home as in the sanctuary of God," the church of childhood, surrounded with a holy atmosphere, a holy spiritual life; "all glowing

about the young soul as a warm and genial nurture, and forming in it, by methods that are silent and imperceptible, a spirit of duty and religious obedience to God. This only is Christian nurture, the nurture of the Lord."

Thus by baptism, prayer, instruction, and example, rear that immortal nursling, for a developement and growth in Christ the Lord. Realizing in your varied and pious efforts, the beautiful description of Goldsmith's village pastor.

> "And, as a bird each fond endearment tries,
> To tempt her new-fledged offspring to the skies,
> He tried each art, reprov'd each dull delay,
> Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way."

And like the pious Eunice, honored in sacred history — immortalized in Christian memory as the mother of Timothy — you shall be blessed in your children, and confer perpetual blessings upon the Church and the world.

"Happy are they who, instead of a tablet in the Church-yard wall, are thus commemorated by polished stones in the living temple." *

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* Hamilton.

Chapter Fifth.

THE INFANTICIDE AT BETHLEHEM.

Then Herod . . . . . sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. — MATTHEW.

"Hail, infant sufferers! martyr'd flow'rets, hail!
Ye fell, as new-born roses fall, when scatter'd by the gale.
Earliest of all were ye that suffer'd for the word,
Sweet firstlings of that slaughter'd flock so precious to the Lord;
And round his heavenly altar now, his high uplifted throne,
Ye guileless sport the crown and palm your martyrdom hath won."

THIS scene of murdered infants is a strange and touching coincidence in the advent of Jesus. Strange, that martyred innocence should signalize the coming of Him whose mission was not to destroy, but to save life! We are conscious of a painful revulsion of feeling in the sudden transition from the cradle of the infant Redeemer, surrounded by the prostrate worship of the

eastern magi, and the adoring wonder of the shepherds, to this sanguinary scene of slaughtered infants, the innocent victims of fiendish passion. There is an indefinable feeling of something painfully inconsonant in that wail of bereaved and sorrowing mothers, almost commingling with the jubilant songs of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

But let no momentary feelings of revulsion, awakened by this tragical scene, exclude from our minds the recognition of a Divine Providence. Let us not view this outburst of tyrannic passion as a wild, ungoverned power, breaking into the domain of Providence. "The Lord reigneth;" and with this concession we are bound to admit the great principle in the dispensations of God, "that whatever evil he permits he overrules for good, although we may not be able always to discern the good produced from the evil permitted."

In this scriptural aspect of Divine Providence, we can believe there was wisdom in the permission of that bloody scene, and that even the Divine goodness did not forsake those homes of calamity. Who will deny that even there, there were hearts that felt that God was near them in that fearful visitation? and, in that

consciousness, looked beyond the surrounding darkness to the calm heaven — to the presence of God above?

But, it may be asked, why did not Almighty goodness interpose, and shield those innocent victims from that murderous hand, and spare those maternal hearts that crushing weight of sorrow? "Had it been best, truly best, in the whole view of things, can we doubt that it would have interposed? Then it was not best." But, still it may be urged, that this was not the work of Providence, but of a vindictive and lawless tyrant. But was Herod beyond the grasp and control of the Omnipotent hand? If not, then was that scene permitted by God, and, according to an obvious principle of the Divine government, overruled and made conducive to wise and gracious ends?

This scene of infanticide, however revolting to our feelings, is not so utterly abnormal in the dispensations of Divine Providence, as to be irreconcilable with the revealed wisdom and goodness of God. We feel no difficulty in the case of the martyr. We almost forget his physical pangs, and the injustice which doomed him to the torturing fires, when we look at his soul and see how it is borne up to the noblest heroism and triumph, converting the very flames which encircle and

consume the body into a chariot, in which his soul is borne to heaven. And yet the martyr is sacrificed to the most enormous error, and the most vindictive passion of which the world can be guilty. But, it may be said, the martyr dies for a principle, for truth, for the good of others. And so did the infants of Bethlehem. They have always been reckoned among the martyrs. And it is beautiful to think, says an eloquent writer, that as the spirits of the martyred little ones soared towards heaven, they may have been taught to look on the infant in whose stead they died; that *He* for whom they had been sacrificed was about to be sacrificed for them, and that they were mounting to glory on the merits of that defenceless Babe, as he seemed then, hurrying as an outcast into Egypt. Oh! the voice of weeping might have been heard in Rama; but those over whom the roused mothers lamented had entered into heaven, as the first fruits to God and the Lamb, and were already celebrating the praises of Him whose blood, not yet shed, had provided for their ransom.* So that the slaughtered infants, dying we almost might say *for* the Saviour, won something like the martyr's crown, which shall forever sparkle on their

* Melvill.

foreheads. "These," as Matthew Henry quaintly says, "were the *infantry* of the noble army of martyrs."

In this aspect, this tragical scene is no more at variance with the goodness of God, than the fate of millions that have suffered martyrdom, the victims of bigotry and persecution.

And then this scene acquires perhaps an undue enormity to the imagination, because viewed as a general picture. It seems an overwhelming catastrophe, because, in part at least, we see all those slain infants, anguished mothers, and shaded homes, grouped together in *one* dark picture. But separate them, individualize them, as they certainly were in the experience. Each home had its own sorrow; each mother had her own anguish, as much alone in her bereavement, her pained affections, her prayers, alone with her God, as if she were the only chastened mother, and hers the only sorrowing home, in Bethlehem. And that scene, save for the horrid manner of its production, is but the scene of every week in a large city, where there are a hundred sorrowing hearts and tearful families, because loved ones have gone to their long home and the "mourners go about the streets."

As a further vindication of this calamitous scene,

from any aspersions which it might seem to reflect upon the mercy and goodness of Divine Providence, we remark, that it was no doubt made subservient to wise and beneficent ends.

Those Jewish mothers may have looked upon their children with an idolatrous pride and affection, each one with a fond and ambitious partiality imagining her own to be the child of prophecy, the Great Deliverer; and if so, they needed that painful discipline which God still administers to parents by the death of their children.

And then it is not difficult to see how these infants were, in an important sense, martyrs for the truth. It was matter of prophetic record, that the Messiah should be born in Bethlehem, and at this particular time; and as Herod, by this infanticide, had exterminated all the other male children, the conclusion was irresistible that Jesus must be the predicted Messiah; so that the very effort to crush the new-born king but served to vindicate his divine mission; and that sword of Herod, crimsoned with the blood of murdered infants, did almost demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah.

In these, and other ways unknown to us, that bloody scene may have subserved important and beneficent

ends, and that too without any essential injury to the innocent victims of Herod's fury. For "the rage of Herod against the infant king but sent the little ones to shout among the blessed His praises,

> Who brought them there,
> Without a wish, without a care."

They were taken from the evil to come — from Judah's impending desolation. It was well for them to be removed from earth, ere it shook under the terrible judgments of God. It was a mercy for those innocent babes to be borne away in their untarnished beauty, before the gathering storm — and of such, how truly it may be said—

> "The less of this poor earth, the more of heaven!
> The briefer life, the earlier immortality!"

This tragical scene at Bethlehem, thus viewed and explained, naturally suggests the following interesting topics of thought upon Little Children, viz., The Death, Mission, Heavenly Home, and Recognition of these little ones.

I.

The Death of Little Children.

"The lovely bud, so young and fair,
Called hence by early doom,
Just came to show, how sweet a flower
In paradise would bloom."

THERE is something in this section, that comes home to our hearts with a touching personal interest. There are few homes in which there is not some sad memorial of departed beauty — some broken link in the chain of association, that comes round with a tearful memory. There are few parental hearts that have not felt the pain of wounded affection, over some withered hope, and in whose memory there still lingers with a chastened sorrow the beauteous image of the early lost.

The death of little children is admitted both in the representations of Scripture and personal experience, to be among the most painful bereavements of providence — one of the most crushing of earthly trials. The grief of repentance over the sufferings of Christ is compared by an inspired prophet, "to the bitter mourning of a father for his child." And the wail of bereaved affec-

tion over the heartless massacre of the children at Bethlehem, is described with imagery most sad and touching, "a mother long dead stirring in her grave at the cry of her children, and rising from the dust which was moistened with their blood that she might water it with her tears." In Rama was then a voice heard, lamentation and weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and would not be comforted because they are not. Matt. xi. 18.

It is in the experience of all a bitter anguish. It is so to the father accustomed as he is to the sterner scenes and conflicts of life. "There is a vacancy in his home and a heaviness in his heart;" and he weeps in all the tenderness of wounded affection—"In all the silent manliness of grief."

But no one feels the death of a child as a mother; its infancy was pillowed on her bosom; every gleam of intelligence and beauty unfolded under her eye; every smile of responsive endearment has sunned her heart; every lisping of its affection is among her treasured memories. It has been around her home as a gleam of sunshine, and its innocent prattle was the music of her life. It is bound to her heart by so many sweet remembrances and associations, by a love so deep

and tender, that its death is like the breaking of a thousand quivering ties. She leans over its last sickness with painful suspense, watching the faint ebbings of life — the flickering light of its closing eyes, and turns away from its looks of death.

"I cannot see thee die: I cannot brook
Upon thy brow to look,
And see death settle on my cradle joy.
And oh! my last caress
Must feel thee cold, for a chill hand is on thee."

And when the dread consciousness comes over the soul like a chilling death-shade, "the child is dead," the heart is smitten and afflicted with a grief too deep for human sympathy, a sorrow too heavy for any hand to lift but God's. And after the first outgushings of grief are over and the mourners have gone to the grave and placed the loved form in the long night of the sepulchre to see it here no more, the sorrowing heart takes its last leave.

"And so farewell!
'Tis a harsh world, in which affection knows
No place to treasure up its loved and lost
But the foul grave."

That is a moment of bitter grief; and when they return to the home all shaded and still, the gleam of

sunshine that was there is gone and hushed in the voice of gladness. And as yearning affection asks will the loved child never return to us? "Nevermore!" O nevermore! "The heart is like an empty mansion and that word goes echoing through its desolate chambers."

O, there is a feeling of sadness and desolation in the heart; and bereavement, dimmed with tears and fainting with sorrow, sighs for light and comfort more than human. And is there no light from Heaven to cheer that home of gloom? Is there no balm in our holy religion to soothe the wounded affections? Are there no words of Jesus for the weeping Rachels, who turn away from human sympathy, and refuse to be comforted because their children are not?

Blessed be the name of the Lord—there is light, there is balm, there are words of Jesus for the anguished heart—words like those once spoken to the tossing sea, "Peace, be still!" words which, when spoken to the tossed and troubled heart, diffuse there a sweet, holy, and heavenly peace.

Let us turn from the dark and earthly side of the picture, to its bright and spiritual phase, and view the light reflected from the Bible upon this scene of affliction.

The Bible teaches the mourners to trace their bereavement to the hand of God, and inspires the conviction that that hand is never stretched out to his people but in mercy; and that its most painful touches are but the chastenings of a Father's love.

I. This is the first source of consolation to the bereaved parents; a higher and purer ground and principle of submission than even that derived from the consoling thought of the child's blessedness; and has been realized as a substantial source of comfort, even without the latter element of joy.

Our bereavements come from God. It is not chance —it is not a blind and ruthless fate that takes the little ones from the warm embrace of parental love. It is the hand of God. Nor must we lose sight of this hand because veiled behind his laws. There is danger in this, because there is in the operation of secondary causes a deceptive veil spread over the senses, that favors the delusion.

If we had seen the vexed prophet beside his withered gourd, we should scarcely have thought of tracing that shrivelled plant to the hand that stretched abroad the Heavens as a curtain; and if we had gone up, and from a closer inspection found the reptile preying on

its roots, the discovery of this immediate cause of its withering would naturally tend to exclude from our minds any recognition of the Divine agency. And in accounting for the matter, we should be likely to say that the worm destroyed Jonah's gourd, without any ulterior reference to the hand of God. This is the popular delusion in regard to Divine Providence.

If pestilence stalk through the land, ye say, This is God's doing;
Is it not also his doing when an Aphis creepeth on a rose-bud?
If an avalanche roll from its Alps, ye tremble at the will of Providence;
Is not that will concerned when the sere leaves fall from the poplar?

TUPPER.

And so if that ephemeral shelter of the prophet had been scathed by the lightning, the spontaneous feeling would have been, it is the hand of God; but seeing a worm at its root, the fading of the plant is sufficiently accounted for, without the recognition of any higher power.

And by the same delusion, if a child were struck by lightning in its mother's arms, we would be ready to acknowledge in that flash the radiant finger of God. But if a child gradually fades and dies by some obvious disease, then we lose sight of God. But what says the Bible? What does it say of that gourd withering over

the head of the angry prophet? "God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd, that it withered." So that even when we can see the immediate cause of events, we are still to refer them to the mediate agency of God.

In this view of divine providence, we are to regard our bereavements as proceeding from God. Death, like every other event, is entirely under his dominion. It is the divine prerogative both to impart life and to take it away; so that whatever may be the immediate cause of death, it must still be traced to *Him*, in whose hand our breath is; so that every one who is bereaved of a child has reason to believe and say, "It is the Lord." David in his bereavement, tracing his sorrow up to God, exclaims, "*Thou* didst it." And Job, in a similar affliction, gives expression to the same sentiment, "The Lord hath taken away."

This is the true ground of submission and consolation. The duty is both obvious and pleasant. It is to be still and know that he is God. If your bereavement is from God, then it is not only wise and just, but perfectly kind and benevolent. And the conviction "that he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men"—"that whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth"—

is adequate reason for the most cheerful and unreserved submission under the severest trials. In this recognition of the divine hand, and quiet submission to the divine will, there is sweet and substantial consolation; there is in that very acquiescent state of mind, that conscious harmony of the heart with the will of God, a sweet and heavenly peace, which passeth all understanding.

I know the loss of a child is a painful touch of the divine hand; it is like rending the very fibres of the heart, and the agonized affections seek for relief and comfort; and it is a holy and delicate office to administer consolation to the wounded spirit. But we know of no consolation for that forlorn and desolate heart, but in the Great Providence of God; but in seeing that their bereavement is not "a chance blow, a random accident, set apart from its beneficent dominion." I can see no other comfort for the mourner; and hard as it may be for the bleeding heart to look upon a trial so painful, as a kind, sacred, and solemn dispensation of heaven, "this I would pray each one to do, to lean upon the bosom of the All-wise Providence, and to say, even as the Great Sufferer said in the dread hour,

when all earthly evils and sorrows were leagued against him, "Father! thy will be done!"—

> "Whate'er thy will ordains,
> O give me strength to bear;
> Still let me know a Father reigns,
> And trust a Father's care."

And that it is not a mere religious common-place to say that this trust can help us, that a humble, childlike faith in the good providence of God, can bring comfort in the darkest hours of human sorrow, is evident from the beautiful illustrations in Scripture, and in our own day, of such submission and such divine consolation in bereavement.

David, when his mind was in painful conflict on the loss of some dear relative or friend, realized in his bereavement the hand of God, and bowed in humble submission to the divine will; and more than this, he seemed to be happy when he said, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." *Job* appeared to be happy when he said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

And there seemed to be a calm and happy feeling in the answer of the Shunamite, "It is well," when the

child of her age, her only child, had just expired in her arms. He was given "like a flower in winter, to cheer the aged parents with its unexpected fragrance, and its late and delicate beauty." Its smile brightened the falling shadows of life's evening, and their quiet home echoed with the merry voice of childhood; and now that late sweet flower is withered; the shadows fall deeper and darker than before, since that child that was as a transient light is gone; it was a bitter sorrow, and yet she could answer "It is well;" and in the feeling of acquiescence in the divine will which prompted that answer there was not only submission, but a secret and shaded joy.

Let those who are called to experience this bitter sorrow "hear the rod, and who hath appointed it;" let them feel "it is the Lord," and that God is good, and all that concerns them is the care of infinite love. This confidence of love will diffuse heavenly consolation through the sorrowing heart. In childlike confidence repose your burdened spirit upon the bosom of that Saviour who was sent "to bind up the broken-hearted, to give the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;" and you will realize a holy rest and joy in God.

"While you feel your wounds are healing,
While the heart is all resign'd;
'Tis the solemn feast of feeling,
'Tis the Sabbath of the mind." — MONTGOMERY.

II. The second source of consolation to the bereaved parents, is the conviction of the child's immortal blessedness in heaven.

It is a sentiment well-nigh universal, that all children who die in a state of infancy are saved; I know that some system-bound expositors of the Bible have expressed the sentiment in a somewhat dubious form; "it is probable, it is to be hoped, that all infants are saved," but that sentiment has never found an echo in a sorrowing heart, it is abjured by all the religious intuitions of the bereaved Christian, and as we conceive by the teachings of the divine word and the whole scheme of redemption; and it is well, that on a subject of such touching interest to bereaved affection, there is not left a lingering shadow to obscure the pleasing hope.

Without entering here upon an elaborate argument for infant salvation, we remark that our belief in this cherished doctrine is derived mainly from the nature and comprehensive scheme of redemption, and the

several utterances of the Saviour concerning children which obviously involve the doctrine.

Christ has died for the sins of the whole world, and his blood cleanseth from all sin; he came into the world to save sinners. There is no evasion of the fact that infants are involved in the fall of Adam and are born with a depraved heart: the Psalmist acknowledged the corruption of his nature, "Lo, in iniquity I was born and in sin did my mother conceive me."

The iniquity and sin meant are not those of his mother, but his own (Alexander on the Psalms). Paul says, "The Scripture hath concluded *all* under sin." Infants are sinners in the important sense, that they as well as the adult can be saved only by the death of Christ; it is this fact which places them within the sphere of redeeming grace; it is because they are sinners in the sense just indicated that we are authorized to believe that, dying in infancy, they are saved by grace, they have never by any personal conscious act disobeyed the will of God, never by voluntary unbelief rejected the Saviour or grieved the Holy Spirit, and are therefore saved by the grace of Christ. Any other view would be utterly at variance with the whole scheme of redeeming mercy, and confound all our con-

ceptions of the equity and goodness of the divine government.

The doctrinal aspect of the subject is forcibly expressed in an old epitaph: —

> Bold Infidelity, turn pale and die;
> Beneath this stone four infant bodies lie.
> Say, are they lost or saved?
> If Death's by sin, they sinned — for they lie here;
> If Heaven's by works, in Heaven they can't appear.
> Reason, oh, how depraved! revere the sacred page;
> They died, for Adam sinned; they live, for *Jesus* died.

The same truth is involved in what Christ on different occasions said concerning little children: "Of such is the kingdom of God." The primary meaning of the Saviour in this declaration, no doubt, is, that his kingdom is composed of such as possess the childlike temper and disposition. But does it not, by a necessary implication, include children in that kingdom? Would it not involve the most glaring solecism to predicate salvation of those who resemble children in their temper and disposition, and yet exclude from Heaven those whom they resemble?

We are, therefore, forced by any fair construction of our Lord's words, to the inference that if his kingdom here is composed of such as possess the childlike

temper, his kingdom there is made up in an eminent degree of little children.

The declarations of Christ, in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, are of similar import. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in Heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." Matt. xviii. 3, 4, 14.

There is no admissible exposition of these several passages, that does not necessarily involve the salvation of children.

This precious doctrine is, therefore, founded upon the atonement of Christ, including children who are saved by grace, and whose salvation is affirmed by the Saviour in those words declarative of their meetness for his Heavenly kingdom. So that the bereaved parent may feel the consoling assurance that the same Saviour who once said of the little ones, "Of such is the kingdom of God," has taken their loved one as a lamb, "safely folded where the spoiler can never come." And in this assurance of faith and hope exclaim —

"Not lost, but gone before."

Remember, that though the tie which bound that child to you is broken, it can never be separated from God; and from you, if a Christian, only for a season. Let this hope cheer your saddened heart, and span the dark cloud that hangs over your home with the beauteous bow of promise. And painful as it may be to take that cherished form from your bosom, and hide it in the gloom of the sepulchre, remember that Jesus has sanctified the grave. And as you go there to meditate in mingled feelings of hope and sorrow, think of those little graves as but "the cradles where, in the quiet motions of the globe, Jesus rocks his sleeping children. And that by and by he will wake them from their slumber, and in the arms of angels they shall be translated to the skies."

"Asleep in Jesus! peaceful rest,
Whose waking is supremely blest."

But, in connection with this one great sustaining hope, there are various collateral aspects of early death of special application to bereaved parents, and which "suggest the richest and sweetest compensations" for their painful loss.

In the translation of your child to heaven in its infant innocence and beauty, all your plans and hopes

concerning it have been fulfilled. Painful as it may be, its death is in fact the realization of more than your brightest dreams and hopes of the future.

You had perhaps planned its education, the development of its mind, and the unfolding of its moral nature, and its adornment with all intellectual refinement and graceful accomplishments; and for the execution of this cherished plan, you feel that you would be prepared to endure the self-denials and privations connected with expenditure of means and the child's absence from home. But, whilst you are planning and dreaming of the future, the child dies. What then? Are your plans frustrated, and your hopes turned into mere illusions of the fancy? Not at all.

> "Ere sin could blight, or sorrow fade,
> Death came with friendly care,
> The opening bud to Heaven conveyed
> And bade it blossom there." — COLERIDGE.

It is transferred to the infant school of heaven, for the peculiar training of these buds and blossoms of immortal being. It is placed in the school of Heaven, under the tuition of the Great Teacher, with the companionship of angels; a school where the only "discipline is love, the only lesson immortality." And can

you murmur when God has interposed to execute your most cherished scheme, only in a different form and on an infinitely higher and grander scale? Can you not patiently bear the temporary absence of your child from the home-circle, knowing that it is only at school, inspired with the hope of meeting it there, radiant with celestial wisdom? and perhaps realize the fancy of the poet, in the confession,

> "Thou art to me a parent now,
> And I a child to thee."

But, as a Christian parent, your tenderest solicitude is for the moral culture and spiritual well-being of the child. It is the growth of that child, surrounded with an atmosphere infected by sin, exposed to the wiles of the Great Destroyer, and the seductive charms of sinful pleasure, to which its native proclivity to evil but too readily responds; it is this prospective exposure and consequent imperilled suspense of its moral destiny, that fills you often with sleepless anxieties and wrestling prayer. And if it should live, with what painful emotions would you witness the first ebullitions of sinful passion, the first flashes of anger, the first developments of that moral virus, which, "however it may brood for a season, in a sort of ambiguous con-

cealment, among the inscrutable mysteries of an infant's spirit," so soon gives painful evidence of the fact that we are all born in sin and shapen in iniquity. And who but a parent knows the watchings and prayers, and tremblings of the heart for a child in these circumstances, and how every expedient that affection can devise, or divine wisdom has suggested, is employed, with prayer, to direct that child to the Lamb of God, to shield it from the evil that is in the world, to train it to virtue, and purity and holiness. This, if you are a Christian parent at all conscious of your responsibility, you have experienced, and can moreover testify that your intensest aims and hopes for your child all culminate in its final salvation in heaven.

But your child is dead — gone before its heart had learned to sin, or its sportive feet to stray — gone

> "Gentle and undefiled,
> With blessings on its head."

Then this bereavement, so sad and touching, is in fact the dissipation of all your fears, and the consummation of all your hopes. Your little one is beyond the reach of sin and pain—

> "Yes, thou art fled—ere guilt had power
> To stain thy cherub soul and form;
> Closed is the soft ephemeral flower
> That never felt a storm!"

It is gone where no sin can enter, and no spoiler come. It is enrobed with the righteousness of Jesus, and its infant voice is attuned to a music and praise sweeter than angels use. Its heart is filled with a bliss and rapture unknown on earth; imparadised in the bosom of Infinite Love!

And much as you feel its loss, painfully as you miss its sunny face and innocent prattle and affectionate greetings in the home gatherings; does it not, now that the violence of your grief is subsiding, seem a gentle and gracious dispensation that removed it from the evil to come?

If that vision of beauty had remained, how soon its brightness had been shaded with sorrow, soiled by sin, and marred by passion! But—

> "Now not a sullying breath can rise
> To dim its glory in the skies!"

No! can you not say, No! child of my love, I would not call thee back from thy pure and sinless and blissful home in the skies, to this home on earth, shaded with sin and sorrow! I would not call thee back to this yearning heart from the bosom of the everlasting Father!

"No! angel, keep thy place
Amid heaven's cherub train."
Feel thy loss I must; weep indeed, I may:—
"But not that from this cup of bitterness
A cherub of the sky has turn'd away."

And I can leave my heart to this bereavement, not only with unmurmuring submission, but with a chastened pleasure and grateful joy. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

II.

The Mission of Little Children.

The sage, and the beetle at his feet, hath each a ministration to perform:
Search out the wisdom of nature, there is depth in all her doings;
A final cause for the aromatic gum, that congealeth the moss around a rose:
A reason for each blade of grass that reareth its small spire. — TUPPER.

THERE is nothing insulated, nothing useless among all the products of the Divine Hand. Every thing has its determined position and its use.

"In the perfect circle of creation, not an atom could be spared:

From earth's magnetic zone to the bindweed round a hawthorn."

Upon all the works of God may be seen the inscription, "none of us liveth to himself." A popular writer of books for children, gives the following illustration of this sentiment. He questions the rose as it hangs on its frail stem in the garden. "Why do you hang there, beautiful flower?" "I hang here to sweeten the air which man breathes, to open my beauties to kindle emotion in his eye, to show him the hand of God who

pencilled every leaf, and laid it thus carefully on my bosom; and whether you find me here to greet him every morning with my opening face, or folding myself up under the cool curtains of evening, my end is the same. I live not to myself."

And thus upon all his works is inscribed the same lesson — upon every atom and every world — upon every drop of dew that feasts an insect or refreshes a flower, and upon every rose that diffuses its sweetness through the air.

That verse in the classic Elegy of Gray, so common and so universally admired, which speaks of flowers wasting their sweetness, &c., though beautiful as a poetical effusion is not true. Without losing any of its poetical beauty, it has been more correctly rendered thus:—

> "No humble flower is born to blush unseen,
> And waste its fragrance on the desert air;
> Although it bloom where *man* has never been,
> Its Maker loves to see its beauty there."

And if this be true of sweet flowers that scent the morn and wither in the sun at noon, we surely cannot say less of little children — those immortal buds and blossoms that beautify the homes of earth, and then fade and die. No; that little child, though its visit be

transient as the dew of the morning, which the warm sun exhales back again to the skies, lived not in vain. It came as an angel on a mission of love. It came as a messenger of mercy to the home it gladdened by its birth, and brightened by its ephemeral but beautiful life, and then left shaded and sad, as it vanished like a vision of beauty, or a dream of the night.

We propose to speak of the *Mission of Little Children* in the following aspects: — Their birth — life — death — memory.

I.

The Advent of a Little Child into the Family.

"A babe in a house is a well-spring of pleasure, a messenger of peace and love:
A resting place for innocence on earth; a link between angels and men;
A delight, but redolent of care."

Its advent is a memorable epoch in the family. It awakens thoughts and feelings unknown before. The mother is conscious of a new fountain unsealed in her soul, gushing with thoughts of tenderness and joy. There is a new sympathy with life; and new hopes dawn and hover over the infant cradle. And how can it be otherwise than that the parents, as they gaze upon that immortal nursling entrusted to them in all its con-

fiding helplessness, should be conscious of new responsibilities, and feel the pulsations of an interest and a love unfelt before.

We are touched with an interest in objects in some measure corresponding to their inherent peculiarities and endowments. The unfolding rosebud is an object of greater interest to the mind than the sparkling diamond; because in the former we recognize the mysterious functions of life secretly working on, until it greets the eye with its full-blown beauty. And for the same reason a singing-bird is an object of greater interest than the rarest flower; because we recognize something more in it than vegetative life, as it goes warbling its music through the air, the "outgushings of the little creature's sweet, innocent, happy soul." And for similar reasons the most beautiful and artistic sculpture of Greece is nothing as an object of thought, in comparison to a poor sickly child that crawls on a cottage floor.

What, then, must be the thoughts and interest awakened in the minds of reflecting parents by that little child, whose diminutive form "belies the soul's immensity!" What their thoughts of responsibility, in the conviction that in that little form, that beautiful

casket, there is an immortal gem that shall shine when the sun is dim! That in that frail and delicate form is enfolded the germ of an immortal mind! That that scarcely perceptible spark of mind may rise to the dimensions of the glowing seraph, rapt in a bliss which all the harps of Heaven cannot express. Or if the radical evil of its nature should be developed, unrestrained by Divine grace, unchecked and uncontrolled by judicious parental discipline, left to the inherent impulses of evil, and the seductions of sin from without, it may grow to be a monster of iniquity in this life, and a doomed spirit in the next—If the parents are led by the presence of that little babe to ponder its future possible destiny, and to reflect that upon them, in an eminent degree, devolves the responsible duty of giving the first impressions, the first direction to that infant and immortal mind—That they are to impress on that plastic nature and ductile mind the image and superscription of Jesus—That on them, to a great degree, will depend the destiny of that child; whether it shall hereafter be a saint in glory, or forever an outcast from Heaven: Can such awakened thoughts and reflections fail to exert a moral influence upon the hearts of the fond parents the most solemn and salu-

tary? Can the mother, with all the gushing tenderness of a new-born joy, as her quickened thoughts go out from that infant cradle to roam through eternity, be otherwise than conscious of a responsibility she never felt before?

"I have wept
With gladness, at the gift of this fair child!
My life is bound up in her. But, oh God!
Thou know'st how heavily my heart at times
Bears its sweet burthen; and if thou hast given
To nurture such as mine, this spotless flower
To bring it unpolluted unto thee,
Take thou its love, I pray thee! give it light!
* * * * * Leave not me
To bring it to the gates of heaven alone!"

This rousing of the soul to great spiritual thoughts — this awakening touch of the nobler sensibilities — this outflow of new-born sympathies—this consciousness of responsibility — this turning of the heart with its sweet burden to God in prayer; — this in itself is an unspeakable blessing to the parent; and if this were all, it would be worthy that little angel's mission, though its visit should be transient as a morning dream.

Religion sanctifies all the events and relations of life, and to devout and pious parents the advent of a little child is consecrated by holy thoughts and heavenly

aspirations. When a new soul is added to your household — a new rose-bud to your bosom — a bright particular star dropped from the upper sphere and dazzling in your diadem, your conscious love of God will give the heavenly visitant the truest, the most prophetic, and most blessed baptismal welcome.*

II. *How beautiful is the mission of a little child* in the household! It is there "like a gleam of sunshine, and a voice of perpetual gladness." It is there with its bright and innocent face and prattle, to diffuse an air of cheerfulness around the home-circle. It is there as a "well-spring of pleasure."

The very presence of such a thing of beauty and innocence unconsciously refines and spiritualizes our nature; what varied and indefinable influences emanate from a little child in the midst of home! It is human nature fresh from the hands of God, like a flower opening in the dewy morning. Its pure affections — its artless friendship — its undissembled sincerity — its gushes of joy — its nameless touches of filial endearment — its winning caresses when its heart begins to open to the meaning of a mother's smile; such a being, such a beautiful impersonation of heavenly innocence and

* Theo. Parker.

purity in the household, must be a source not only of pleasure, but of influences softening and purifying. When the father comes from the dusty and jostling scenes of business, filled with care — his spirit soiled by contact with sordid and selfish intrigue, or by the policy and insincerity and dissembled friendship of the world; when he returns from such scenes to the sanctity of home, and meets there a little child with its sunny smile and lisping welcome, its artless sincerity and pure affection, he feels something of a childlike temper and spirit transferred into his own, something that soothes his fevered spirit and vexing cares, and reattunes his heart to the gentler movement and harmony of the affections, and he feels himself a better and happier man. With what touching simplicity has Burns, in his "Cotter's Saturday Night," pictured this idea.

> "The lisping infant prattling on his knee,
> Does a' his weary carking cares beguile,
> An' makes him quite forget his labor and his toil."

We need just such an influence to counteract the coarser tendencies of the cares of life, and to soften the asperities engendered by attrition with the world, and to evolve the gentle feelings and sympathies of the heart, and keep them fresh and youthful. It exerts an

influence on us like that attributed by Carlyle to the natural strains of Burns, amidst the choir of English poetry. A child, by its purity and innocence, by shedding around us the mirrored sunshine of our own youth and simplicity, revives "the youthful freshness of human feeling, and keeps in harmony those delicately tuned chords of the human heart, which, in the trials of life, are so apt to lose the sweetness of their primitive melody." And this is precisely the influence of a little child in a family. It is there as a beautiful flower, a memorial of the Eden lost, and most perfect emblem of Eden regained. It stands still where it was placed by Jesus in the midst of the disciples; and it is there now, as it was then, to teach us purity, faith, sincerity, simplicity; recalling, by association, the words of our Lord, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." They are in our homes as the most eloquent little preachers, both by what they are and by what they recall; reminding us of the temper and disposition we must acquire and cherish, and the character we must assume, in order that we may be made meet for the kingdom of heaven.

Nor should we overlook this influence of a little child

in the family, because it steals over us and into us so softly and insensibly, any more than we should question the influence of light, because we never heard the sun shine. Like the light which visits us every morning so softly as not to disturb the sleeping infant, yet quickens all nature into life and beauty, so gently does this influence touch the very life-roots of our humanity, permeate our emotional nature, educing the gentler graces of the spirit; an influence silent, yet vivifying as the glance of the sunbeam; noiseless, yet refreshing as the morning dew. To estimate such an influence by the ordinary tests of value, would be, in the quaint figure of Carlyle, as absurd as to estimate the value of the sun by the amount of gas-light that is saved by his shining; overlooking his universal diffusion of life and warmth, cresting the hills with beauty, and crowning the summer-fields with the golden harvests.

III. But there is another aspect of that little child in the midst of the family, in which its mission of good is perhaps more obvious and tangible, though not so pleasing in the experience. It is there not only as an object of beauty and innocence, but, as it grows, it soon becomes the subject of discipline; and the training of that little one becomes to the parent a school of faith

and patience and prayer. Take the case of a young mother. Her earlier life has been one of comparative exemption from care, with but little to exercise the virtues of faith and patient endurance. See that young mother as she begins the discipline of her little child; as she witnesses the first ebullitions of passion, the flashings of anger in the scream and stamp, the mutterings of the indomitable will. But a short time before it was the gentle, unconscious infant in her arms; now it stands before her invested with the terrific attribute of will, assuming a hostile attitude of rebellion, of resistance to authority. And there is nothing can meet such a crisis but moral firmness; nothing can successfully control and subdue that will in its first outbursts of passion and insubordination, but the gentleness and patience of piety, and the conscious strength of faith and prayer. And if that mother has any consciousness of her own weakness, and the interests involved in such a moment, it will be the awakening of her soul to serious thoughts and earnest appeals to heaven for help, for wisdom and grace to meet a crisis so fraught with the future destiny of the child.

A personal friend, some time since related to me a trial of this kind in his individual experience. His

child, in a paroxysm of passion, defied parental authority; every effort of tenderness and persuasion, and even severity, seemed but to exasperate the rebellion of the child against the will of the parent, until the father, in utter despair of all human expedients to reach the case, caught the child in his arms, fell on his knees, and cried to God for help. When they rose from prayer, the stubborn will was broken, and the rebellious heart subdued, and the child was meek and gentle as a lamb. That parent, rising from that conflict crowned with victory, from that prostration of his soul before God in prayer, was a better and happier man. So that the parent, in the very process of disciplining the child, was himself the subject of a discipline the most marked and salutary; and by an obvious reflex action, the training of the child becomes the schooling of the parent in all the graces of the Spirit; so that the child is the occasion of developing and perfecting the character of the parent, whilst in the process of its educational training. In this sense we recognize an important mission in little children.

And then how often are they made more directly the messengers of mercy to the parents! In how many instances has the utterance of religious truth, the gentle

rebuke from the lips of childhood, touched the last chord of religious sensibility in a heart that has been inaccessible by every other means! How often have the sweet breathings of prayer, or the lisping of infant hymns, been the sanctified means of salvation to irreligious parents! Many an irreligious father has been led to the house of God by the hand of childhood, and many a prayerless mother has been directed to the Lamb of God by the lisping infant. Numerous well-authenticated facts might be adduced confirmative of these statements, but they will readily occur to the mind of the reader.

A little child, as it rose from prayer, just before going to Sabbath School, in all the simplicity of its heart turned to its mother and said, "Mother, does my father ever pray?" This question, overheard by an infidel father, was an awakening word to his soul. That scene in a religious conference in the West, has many a parallel in the Chronicles of Eternity: a father rose to speak, with deep emotion, and placing his hand upon the head of a child that sat by his side, said "Here is my spiritual father." Verily, "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise!"

IV. We come now to the sad but holy mission of a little child in its last sickness and death. The sufferings of a sick and dying child are among the most painful and mysterious things in providence, and yet the parent and the child may be happier forever for the dark cloud that brooded over its cradled infancy.

The vigil of parental love beside a sick child is a sanctuary of religion. What a nursery of patience, and holy endurance, and prayer! What an unsealing within us of all tenderness and sympathy! What ever-varying ministrations of gentleness and love; whilst with every office of affection is woven some new link of endearment! And when the scene grows darker, and that innocent little one is convulsed with pain and suffering, what a painful sense of the fact and evil of sin, is the sight of a thing so beautiful and pure doomed to suffer and die! And when the dreaded crisis draws near, and that little child, in the convulsive throes of dissolving nature, turns with a look that pleads so tenderly and thrillingly to the parents for help, oh! then must the parental cry go up to the pitying Heavens for help; and nothing but the infinite and immortal can help them! In such a moment, what is all of earth but vanity, and all earthly hopes but

illusions? and the heart turns to the everlasting Gospel and the ever-compassionate Saviour for something upon which to rest, and seeks the everlasting arms to bear them up.

What a mighty spiritualizing transformation is wrought in the soul by a scene and an experience like this! That touching picture of Luther beside the couch of his suffering child, has many repetitions in this world of sickness and death. The great Reformer, in the bitterness of grief, knelt in prayer beside his dying Margaret. As he rose in tears, he caught the faltering accents of "weep not for me," a sweet smile, like a transient gleam of opening Heaven, resting upon her pale face, and she said, "I go to my Father in Heaven;" and the sweet words of hope awakened the response from the father's sorrowing heart—The will of the Lord be done! Yes, she has gone to her Father in Heaven! Luther was a better, a holier man after that discipline of sorrow beside his sick and dying child. Margaret finished her mission of love to the great Reformer, and returned to Heaven.

How often does the last scene of sickness seem to canonize the beautiful religion of childhood for everlasting remembrance! The touching decay, the fading

from life, seems like an investment of immortal beauty. That smile, so sweet and holy, on the placid brow — that spiritual brightness of the eye — that meek and unmurmuring submission — those lispings of remembered hymns about Jesus and Heaven — those little hands lifted in prayer, that seem almost to open to our view the doors of eternity—and that final trust in Jesus and hope of Heaven breathed from the lips of a dying child—O ! there is nothing on earth can awaken within us such a sense of the Divine beauty and preciousness of our holy religion, and touch our hearts with such a glow of a Saviour's love. And we bless God for such a mission of angelic goodness.

And beside all this, what eloquent and saving messages and appeals have been made by dying children to the sorrowing parents. Appeals which by Divine grace have been made the power of God unto salvation. Arvine records the instance of an infidel standing by the bedside of his dying child. Little James looked up and said in all the simplicity of his heart, "Father, I am very happy, I am going to Heaven ; *will you meet me there, father?*" That touching appeal, under the Divine blessing, was instrumental in his subsequent conversion ; and the father lived to

cherish the hope of meeting his child in Heaven. The same author records a similar instance of a little child, with its simple and childlike conceptions of the future, saying to an impenitent father, "Father, I am going to see Jesus; what shall I tell him is the reason you won't love him?" and then expired. It proved a word in season, and was blessed to the salvation of the parent. But we need not multiply instances. These little missionaries have not preached in vain; they have not lived in vain. Many a little child will have seals in Heaven of its angelic mission on earth.

V. Allow me to speak more particularly of the mission of a little child by its *death* and memory; and this we think can be done without any material iteration of what has already been said.

> "Our God, to call us homeward,
> His only Son sent down,
> And now, still more to tempt our hearts,
> Has taken up our own."

There is no earthly relation so tender, so affectionate, as that subsisting between the parent and the child. It awakens the deepest and strongest affections of our nature; and when that child dies, it touches the deepest springs of sorrow in the soul. "What then? Do our

affections sink back into our hearts — become absorbed and forgotten? O! no; they reach out after that little one; they follow him into the unseen and spiritual world."

And is there not often need of just such an awakening sorrow? Some minds are so encased with worldliness, that nothing but this concussion of the heart will break the earthly mould that incrusts the soul; so wrapped in spiritual stupor, that nothing but this rending of the sensibilities will rouse it to any degree of religious consciousness; so blinded by the god of this world, that nothing but a dying infant's hand can rend the veil, and let in some light from the unseen spiritual world. It is when the treasure which lies nearest to the heart is taken away, that the illusions of sense are dissolved, and the earth-spell is broken; and there is a momentary consciousness, like a sudden flash from the unseen world, revealing at once the vanity of this world and the reality of the next; darkening earth and opening heaven. It is a dark but blessed sorrow. "Night brings out stars as sorrow shows us truths:

> ——— We never see the stars
> Till we can see nought but them."

And so, when affliction such as this darkens the

earth, it brings out to view bright things above us. Heaven becomes a vivid, subjective reality. Our hearts are detached from the seen and temporal, and aspire to the unseen and eternal. And if that little child came but to smile and die, to win our hearts "with that infant look and angel smile," and then, vanishing from earth, bearing our thoughts and our hearts with it to the brighter skies, it has performed a mission by its early death worthy of its coming.

The shepherd gathering his flock at night, takes the little lamb in his arms, and bears it to the fold, sure that the mother will follow. So Christ, the Good Shepherd, takes the little child, and folds it to his bosom in glory; and thus, by the bright and yearning chain of love, draws the parent to the child. And many a parent has found in the experience of this sad bereavement, "that the tie which seemed to be dropped and broken, God has taken up to draw them closer to him;" and conscious of the gracious designs of Providence, has yielded to the sweet attraction, exclaiming,

> ——————"draw me to my child!
> And link us close, O God! when near to Heaven."

But the mission of a little child, fading like a tender plant, ceases not at death. It has left an influence

more abiding than the shadow of its evanescent life. The sorrow felt at its departure was not as a flitting cloud or falling shower, here, and then gone and forgotten. It is rather as the smiting of the rock, whose streams follow us through the wilderness. "Now no chastening," says the Apostle, "for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Heb. xii. 11.

The immediate effect of the bereavement was salutary, but afterwards there is a silent mellowing influence upon our character through life. It is the remembrance of that child — its innocent life — its numberless endearments—its last look—its smile, beautiful in death, as "the signet-ring of heaven;" these remembrances "surround us with a softening atmosphere, and the light they shed down on us is the light of sunset, mellowed and shaded in its passage through the clouds of evening." And from the heart, softened and chastened by these sacred and undying memories, there grow ever afterwards the graces of the spirit; and "holy aspirations, like mosses and flowers amid the crumbling of ancient structures, grow greenly through and over the rents of life's ruins."

It is thus the child being dead yet speaketh. The image of its beautiful and innocent life becomes a sacred and sanctifying memory. So it was with Luther, after the death of little Margaret. Writing to his friend Justus Jonas, he says, "On my very soul are engraved the looks — the words — the gestures during her life and on the bed of death of my obedient, my loving child!" And it was to him a benedictive and sanctifying memory; and it is so to every Christian parent. And is it not well for us to have our homes sanctified by the memory of the departed, and the glare of the world around us softly veiled over by the shadow of death; a shadow which has healing in it for the soul, as that of Peter for the body? It gives a tinge of sadness to life — beautiful, but passing away, and a chastened hue to our own life, hopeful and happy, but thoughtful of death.

The memory of a little child, once as a gleam of sunshine in our home, and now ensphered in heaven, as a star to shine onward and onward through the depths of the everlasting ages, is to the parents a fountain of blessed and saving thoughts.

Its beauteous image is enshrined in the heart forever; its memory is still around us — its sweet voice is still

echoing in our ears like distant music, and it still speaks to us in moments of quiet thought — in the cold shadow of memory — in the bright light of hope.

And if "a thing of beauty is a joy forever," then that little one will be to us a joy forevermore, for it will always live in our memory as a child. The children left to us here, grow old and lose that indefinable beauty and charm of childhood; but the one in heaven is a perennial child. Years may pass away, and all around us may change, but that one is still to us as at first, a bright and happy child.

> "We fold it in our arms again, we see it by our side
> In the helplessness of innocence, which sin has never tried."

And is not such a memory as an angel-presence? is there not something soothing, spiritualizing, sanctifying in such a memory? is it not around us as a guardian angel, or as a glorified spirit? does it not speak to us from its bright and happy home, saying, Weep not over the faded and fading hopes of earth — bear meekly the allotted cares and sorrows of life! Look up and come — come to this bright and heavenly home!

And shall we not go? Do not our hearts catch a heavenward aspiration, sweetly urging us upward and homeward?

"Thou — thou in heaven, and I on earth —
May this one hope delight us,
That thou wilt hail my second birth
When death shall re-unite us."

Blessed! living or dying, is the mission of a little child!

III.

Little Children in Heaven.

"They are all there in heaven,
Safe, safe, and sweetly blessed,
No cloud of sin can shadow
Their bright and holy rest."

This subject, we conceive, is of sufficient novelty and interest to occupy a distinct place, and is deserving of something more than the cursory view in the close of the preceding section.

Assuming here the doctrine of infant salvation, what a bright and lovely phase does it give to the triumphs of redeeming grace in our world of sin! What vast and beautiful trophies of the cross are gathered from all climes and generations! What glimpses, what transporting visions of the heavenly home!

According to the usual and accredited estimate, one-half of our race die in childhood, and of this half, the

greater proportion in early infancy. This fact, though sad and tearful in the individual experience of the bereaved, is, when viewed objectively, a grand fact, all-lustrous with the grace and glory of the Redemption.

Of that vast multitude whom John saw before the Lamb from all nations and tongues, waving their palms and shouting "Salvation to our God," the great proportion were children. A proportion, says John Newton, so greatly exceeding the aggregate of adult believers, that, comparatively speaking, his kingdom may be said to consist of little children.

And, since that vision of John, we have reason to believe there has been the same ratio of accession to the redeemed host of heaven, from our sinful race on earth. During the eighteen intervening centuries since, the vast majority of those that have gone up to the gate of heaven have been infant members. Indeed there has been almost from the gate of Eden, a long continuous line of procession of infant souls from among all nations going up to Mount Zion. And that ladder of the patriarch, with the angels of God ascending and descending, is a perpetual fact, though there be no dreaming Jacob to see it; angels descending unceasingly to minister to the infant heirs of salvation, and

then ascending, bearing in their homeward flight the innocent babes to Abraham's bosom.

There is something in this fact both illustrative of the riches of divine grace and inspiriting to the Christian mind, contemplating the achievements of redemption in our world. There is much in the spiritual aspect of our world that to the eye of sense is sad and depressing. Over millions of our race there yet hangs the starless night of paganism; there are millions who have never heard the name of Jesus; thousands in Christian lands, who seem wholly indifferent to the claims of the Gospel; so that the faithful minister is often led to exclaim, with a feeling of despondency, "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

But the feelings of depression occasioned by this aspect of the moral world are relieved by the exhilarating fact that millions of infant souls are gathered as the trophies of redeeming love from among all people. And the Saviour's cross, like Aaron's rod, has budded and blossomed with these infant souls, saved by grace. Even in lands shrouded in moral gloom, and in Christian lands where iniquity still abounds, and comparatively few seem to heed the Gospel; even in these

lands, and among all kindreds and people, "Christ sees the travail of his soul and is satisfied."

In the dark picture of this world of sin, that lovely posture of the Saviour in the Gospel welcoming the little ones to his arms, still stands out to my view, all the more bright and beautiful from the dark background of the picture. And it is a soul-cheering fact, that from every age and clime the Great Shepherd has been gathering these lambs of the flock to the Paradise regained—

> "In the immortal bowers,
> Dwelling by life's clear rivers,
> Amid undying flowers."

And we may presume that the Saviour, as a man of sorrows, was cheered by this interesting feature of success in his redemptive work; and this was undoubtedly an important constituent of that joy in view of which he "endured the cross, despising the shame"—the joy of bringing many sons unto glory. He must have been conscious, that of all the souls that would be redeemed by his blood, the vast majority would be children; and hence the very sight of these little ones would affectingly remind him of his home in heaven, where

> "Millions of infant souls compose
> The family above."——

It is to that family of infant souls we now turn our thoughts, as directed by our theme of

LITTLE CHILDREN IN HEAVEN.

It is a theme, it is true, that is dim with mystery; and yet one upon which our thoughts love to linger; for many of us have children in that family, whom it is a joy as well as a sorrow to remember, and with whom our hearts still love to commune, in the sad reverie of contemplation, the sweet visions of faith, or the bright light of hope.

If it were revealed that in some particular star in the sky was the home of the blessed, how would we love to watch its gentle radiance in the grey twilight of evening, and sometimes to lift the telescope to brighten to our vision that beaming star, to our affections the fairest of all the heavenly train. But, though the world in which some of our loved ones dwell is not visible to the naked eye, even in the dim and distant Heavens, it is no less real to the inward perceptions and intuitions of the soul, and to that religious faith which Paul tells us is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Just as we believe in the material world around us, because we

have senses and not because some one attempts logically to prove it, so we believe in the world above by the spiritual intuitions of the soul, and the inner perceptions of faith. Its proof is not the reasoning of Butler or any other man. Not even "the letter" of any Scriptural text. Its faith, its Christian faith, is all the argument it needs. "Faith itself," as declared by the Apostle, "is the basis of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." And hence that heavenly world is as real to my spiritual intuitions, to my Christian faith, as the world around me is to my senses.

It is to that beautiful phase of Heaven as the home of little children, that we now direct our meditations.

I. Our first thought is of their arrival there. And what a glow of pleasure spreads over the face of Heaven, the joyous welcome of the infant pilgrim! What ecstatic greetings from the angels of the infant spirit saved by grace, coming as it does from a world of sin, coming, as in some instances, from an irreligious home, a wicked father, and a prayerless mother! Conscious as the angels may be of the perils that encompassed that budding spirit here, surrounded by an atmosphere of sin, embosomed in a family infectious

of evil, where its unfolding mind would contract defilement, and its final salvation be imperiled — *how* must such a child be received, rescued from such a world — from such a prayerless home — where its spiritual destiny hung in such perilous suspense — "plucked as a brand out of the fire,"—with what gratulations will all the angels welcome its arrival at the gate of Heaven! and gathering around the early-saved, gaze with admiring wonder and fresh ecstacy of joy upon this new apocalypse of redeeming grace, and this new disclosure of the Saviour's glory. If there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, O what a sweet wonder and joy must fill all Heavenly minds over every babe received into glory!

II. And then what a pleasing object of thought is the child *in* Heaven! If we strive in vain to fancy the glory which surrounds a saint when first greeted with the visions of the celestial world, how impossible to conceive the beauty and felicity of a babe in glory! Its first lisp of language is the name of Jesus; its first conscious exercise of belief, faith in his atoning blood, and the first and simplest feelings and emotions which its heart beats, intelligent and self-conscious, are of gratitude and love to him. And the first song in

which their joy finds utterance must be the anthem, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."

What an object of interest is that child to the angels of God! and with what a halo of spiritual beauty and glory does it rise in the sweet visions of faith in the serene imaginings of the parent's heart—*My little child in Heaven!* one of the youngest and sweetest choristers in the heavenly choir; or perhaps sitting among the angels, cherubim and seraphim, as the youthful Saviour once sat among the doctors in the temple, hearing and asking questions. It is a vision that must charm away all tears from sorrowing eyes, and hush all notes of grief, or turn them into gushing strains of joy and praise!

"Thy feeble feet, unsteady,
That tottered as they trod,
With angels walk the heavenly streets,
Or stand before their God.

Thy little hand, so helpless,
That scarce its toys could hold,
Now clasps its mate in holy prayer,
Or strikes a harp of gold.

Thine eyes, so curbed in vision,
Now range the realms of space,
Look down upon the rolling stars,
Look up — in God's own face."——

3. Apart from any personal affinity, there is something attractive in this feature of the heavenly world. The admixture of those innocent nurslings in the society of heaven gives an inexpressible charm to our Father's house. There is something homelike in their buoyant steps and gladsome voices, ringing through the many mansions. Like morning and springtime with its flowers and singing-birds to the earth, they give freshness and beauty and a sort of spring-charm to the heavenly paradise.

And if we bear with us our sanctified earthly affections and sympathies to the spiritual world, the mingling of millions of redeemed children, with the scenes and associations, the service and praises of that world must give a morning freshness and a summer beauty an indefinable charm to the heavenly home.

And if the Saviour loved little children on earth, will he regard them with less tenderness in heaven? Will not the host of redeemed children be inexpressibly dear to Him, who washed them in his blood, and made them meet for heaven? They must ever be to Him, as well as to angels, the most beautiful monuments of his grace in heaven. It may be they are permitted to occupy the inner circle of the redeemed around the

throne. "The smallest planet is nearest the sun. Ye stand nearest to God, ye little ones." And there, nearest the Lamb, they cast their little crowns, and warble the music of their praise in strains sweeter than angels use, singing, "Not by works of righteousness which we had done, but of his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour."

That chant of redeeming love by children may be the sweetest of all the music of heaven; those infant strains the grandest of all the choral symphonies of the skies. "Perhaps, indeed, it is this very thing of which the Psalmist caught a view, by inspiration, when he exclaimed, 'O Lord, thou hast set thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise!' No *literal* interpretation can be given to that passage in any other way. But if you translate it of the infant singers in heaven, it is a very natural window opened into the glories of the celestial world."

IV. And finally; — What an interesting subject of study and observation must these children be to the older inhabitants of heaven! To see the unfolding of the

infant mind, and the evolution of the affections in heaven; — to see the ecstatic bewilderment of joy — and mysterious sense of the grandeur and glory of the celestial world, as they dawn and break in upon their opening senses. Indeed every spirit, upon its first introduction into heaven, is, in some sense, like a child, amid those new and wondrous scenes; and so was every newborn angel; they can never forget their first impressions, as the glories of heaven burst upon their enraptured souls, and this will give them a peculiar sympathy with the little children there.

Dr. Adams mentions the statuary of "the chanting cherubs," with some anonymous lines, representing the conversation of a child with its guardian angel, on its way from earth to heaven; in which the child says, as it draws near the light which no man can see and live,

> "O I cannot bear this glory;
> Sister Spirit, how canst thou?"

The angel answers,—

> "I will tell thee all my story!
> I was once as thou art now."——

This idea is developed and expressed so beautifully by Dr. Cheever, that we prefer giving it to you in his own language, to any further remarks of our own.

He says, "for aught we know, there may be a form

of glory, or degrees and qualities of glory, resulting from such a development in heaven, transcending all other manifestations of the manifold wisdom of God through the church to all ages.

And as we have reason to believe that so vast a preponderating multitude of those transmitted from our world to heaven die in infancy and childhood, so the greater part of heaven is filled with just such scenes, and heaven might be conceived as one vast ecstatic holy school of youthful happy spirits. What curious, wondrous, blissful forms of the wisdom and love of the Creator, combined with the perfection of the work of our Divine Redeemer, may be seen in the evolution of the infant immortal spirit, from the very bud of being — who shall tell? . . . . Oh certainly to see the growth of a mind in heaven, to watch its developings in Christ, above the brightness of the firmament, must be a process of glory so exquisite, that nothing which we now see in the grandeur and beauty of all this material universe can bear any proportion to its loveliness."

"An infant's soul — the sweetest thing of earth,
To which endowments beautiful are given
As might befit a more than mortal birth,
What shall it be, when 'midst its winning mirth
And love, and truthfulness, 'tis borne to heaven?

Will it grow into might above the skies? —
A spirit of high wisdom, glory, power,—
A cherub guard of the Eternal Tower,
With knowledge filled of its vast mysteries?
Or will perpetual childhood be its dower?
To sport forever, a bright, joyous thing,
Amid the wonders of the shining thrones,
Yielding its praise in glad but feeble tones,
A tender dove beneath the Almighty's wing."

IV.

Recognition.

"The kindred tie that bound us here,
Though rent apart with many a tear,
Shall be renewed in Heaven!" — HUIE.

THE hope of the future recognition of departed friends is one of the most cherished of the human heart. It seems to be the universal sentiment of mankind. In every age, and among every people, untutored or refined, it exists, though in some instances in the mystic forms of superstition, as one of the primitive and indestructible instincts of our moral nature. It is whispered in the farewell of the dying, "meet me in Heaven;" and the smile that is sometimes seen to linger so sweetly on the cold brow of infancy in its last

sleep, seems like a parting hope and pledge of reunion.

"Where worlds no more can sever
Parent and child forever."

This sentiment, breathed in our devotions, vocalized in some of our sweetest music, and inscribed upon the tombs of the departed, cannot be a mere illusion of the fancy. This intuition of the heart, this promise of "the elder Scripture," cannot be the "herald of a lie." No; this pleasing hope is a presentiment of the recognition of our friends in that nightless land.

It is easy to conceive difficulties in the admission of this cherished doctrine. It is objected, that in the disembodied state there will be none of the present media of recognition; but this objection is wholly negative and gratuitous. No one will presume to assert that there may not be other than mere physical media of recognition; for no one is sufficiently acquainted with the mysterious functions of mind to affirm that the soul cannot recognize its kindred soul by intuition; or that there may not exist a purely spiritual recognition independently of all material agency. There must be among pure spirits some mode of recognition and intercommunion, of which we at present can form no con-

ception. There is, at least, no inherent absurdity in the case that should lead any one to pronounce this pleasing hope of the heart a dream or delusion, even prior to its confirmation by the inspired Word.

After the resurrection, the assumed difficulties, to which allusion has just been made, cannot exist. Then the spirit will be reinvested with a body, which, however refined and spiritualized, will still be a body, according to Paul, a "spiritual body." Now we know that the artist can transfer to the canvass, or engrave on steel, a likeness so accurately and distinctly marked as to be recognized by a friend anywhere, and after the lapse of many years. And the daguerrean process of taking sun-pictures is a still more striking illustration of the rationale of this recognition.

The image traced by the solar beam is so true and striking, that a casual glance is sufficient for recognition. And yet it is so ethereal, that it might almost be called a spiritual image. We can hardly conceive that the difference between our present gross material bodies and our future spiritual bodies will be greater than that between our living faces and the shades of light upon the metallic plate. So that however changed, refined, and celestialized our forms and

features may be after the resurrection, it may be as easy to recognize our friends in heaven, as for the parent to see in a sun-picture the image of a long-lost child. And just as readily as a parent's eye would detect at a glance the picture of a child among a thousand other pictures, may the intuitive perceptions of love recognize those that have been dear on earth, though Heaven be full of spiritual daguerreotypes. And the mother by a feeling may know her child

> "By a thrill like that, which, when first he smiled,
> Came o'er her soul."——

The objection that the absence of some loved one would mar the felicity of heaven, is purely speculative, and unworthy of serious consideration. We know, that there the soul will be brought into such perfect sympathy and unison with the will, purposes, and glory of God, that no fact can disturb the perfect peace, or cast a momentary shadow over the bright and happy spirit. And we dismiss this whole difficulty, which some have conceived in the admission of this doctrine, with the somewhat fanciful and original thoughts of William Anderson of Glasgow: — "Many a mother will not find her son in heaven, and yet the Saviour will make her perfectly happy; there can be no grief

in the Paradise of God, not even for a perished son. Christ will bring her some other woman's child, who has been seeking for his mother in vain, and he will say, 'Woman, behold thy son,' and to him, 'Behold thy mother,' and the wounds of the hearts of both will be healed."

Whatever speculative difficulties may be associated with this doctrine, they can never extinguish this indigenous hope of the human heart. Can we suppose that this pleasing anticipation, which sweetens the cup of sorrow — this sweet hope, which throws over the dark hour of bereavement the beauteous bow of peace and promise, are mere illusions of the fancy? Never; it is no mirage of the desert, to cheat the eye and mock the heart of the weary and sorrowing pilgrim. It is the intuition of the heart — the pleasing presentiment of the soul, as the earnest and evidence of the anticipated reunion; an intimation from the God of nature, that it is no delusive fancy, but a blessed reality.

And we find these pre-intimations of our moral nature sustained by the suggestions and positive teachings of the Divine Word.

The frequent allusions of the Saviour to the future, involve the pleasing intimation, that the affiliations

and home affections of earth will be renewed in the perfect, social, and spiritual affinities of heaven. These allusions are verified by a more positive affirmation of the doctrine, in other portions of the inspired word. We will select a few passages, without reference to the chronological order in which they occur in the Bible, together with our practical illustration of the doctrine.

I. The Apostle Paul, in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, (1 Thes. ii. 19,) says, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" This animating language obviously implies the mutual recognition of the minister and his people. The judicious Macknight makes the following comment on this verse. "The manner in which the Apostle speaks of the Thessalonians in this passage shows that he expected to know his converts at the day of judgment. If so, we may hope to know our relations and friends there."

II. We have, in 1 Thes. iv. 13–18, these consolatory words: "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope; for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so

them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep; for the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; when we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we even be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Dr. Cumming gives the following beautiful and comforting view of this passage:—

"The subject on which comfort is here required is the death or removal of beloved friends and relatives. The consolation specially announced is not the resurrection, but the reunion of departed friends, and the restoration of suspended or interrupted intercourse. The Apostle proceeds upon the supposition that the resurrection is an admitted fact, and shows that there will be superadded to that resurrection this special consolation, viz., the recognition of our risen relatives and friends. Were some beloved relative, or child, or

parent, about to depart to a distant land, would it be sufficient comfort to tell you, that you also would be carried there in due time, but to a different part of that beautiful land; so that while you would be aware that your beloved ones were on its face, yet you could neither see nor hold communion with them? This would be dispersion, not gathering together. There would be no comfort in this. The real comfort would be the prospect of reunion; and the summons not to sorrow, and the promise that you would be taken there, would all imply the restoration of the fellowship and the recognition of the persons of those you loved below."

III. The words of Jesus, addressed to Martha in the hour of bereavement, are equally explicit upon this subject. "Thy brother shall live again"—thy brother! If this was intended merely to assert the fact of a resurrection, it did not meet the stricken heart of Martha, for of this she was already conscious; and even if she had not been, there was nothing in the mere promise of future existence to impart comfort to sorrowing friendship. It would be something to personal expectation, but nothing to bereaved affection. There was something more than the assertion of a future resurrection and a future life—"Thy brother shall rise

again!" — Thy brother! "Not some undefined spirituality, not some new and strange being shall go forth beyond the mortal bourne; but life — life in its character, its affections, its spiritual identity, such as it is here; thy *brother* shall rise again. He is not lost to thee; he shall not be so spiritually changed as to be forever lost to thee; on some other shore, as if he had only gone to another hemisphere, instead of another world; on some other shore thou shalt find him again — find thy brother. Thus much must have been taught, or there had been no pertinency, no comfort in the teaching."*

This strikes us as the true and natural import of those words of Jesus, to a sister's wounded affection. He shall live again to you — a brother recognized and known. Weep not as though you should never see him again; as though you should never know him in all the endearment of his brotherly affection; for he shall be to you again in all the fraternal affinity which, in its suspension now, makes you so sad and tearful. This assurance would soothe the heart of Martha; and the same consolatory assurance is given to all bereaved Christians who mourn departed kindred and friends

* Dewey, Discourses on Human Life.

in Jesus—they are not dead—they yet live in a better world—

> ——————— "hid from our mortal eyes
> By that bright day, which ends not; as the sun
> His robe of light flings round the glittering stars."

And there you shall see them and know them again, in the sweet and unending affiliations of heaven.

IV. We have in David's bereavement, recorded in 2 Sam. xii. 22–23, a positive recognition of this doctrine. "And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

The removal of that child was to David a bitter sorrow, a painful bereavement, and yet he is calm and peaceful; and he lets us know the source of his comfort, and the hope which, like an inspiration, flashed from earth to heaven, illumining his midnight sorrow. It was the conviction that his babe was in heaven, and the thought of meeting it there. Nor was it a mere fancy, the fond anticipation that spontaneously rises in the sorrowing heart, vague and undefined. There was

something clear, defined, and personal, in the hope expressed, "I shall go to him!" not merely to heaven, but to *him;* I shall recognize that loved one in glory.

Nor does his confidence falter in view of the time that might elapse before he should be called to realize the anticipated reunion. It was nearly twenty years from the time this little child was borne from its infant cradle to Abraham's bosom, to the period of David's appearance in the celestial world. Twenty years the child would have been in heaven with Moses and Elias in glory, a lamb in the fold of Christ there, before his earthly parent would again see him; and could he be expected to know, in the bright form of a seraph, educated for twenty years in the presence and likeness of Jesus, his own departed babe? Why not, as well as Elijah, when translated to heaven, could be expected to know Moses, who had been dwelling in heaven five hundred years before Elijah went hither? There would be no more of mystery in the one recognition than in the other, but an equal delight and glory. That a Christian parent should recognize a child passed into the skies, and educated there, is no more mysterious than that Moses and Elijah should recognize each other,

or rather *know* each other, though they never met on earth, but only in heaven." *

From those references, it is evident that the hope of the future recognition of our friends in heaven is confirmed by the frequent allusions, as well as positive affirmations of the Divine Word.

And we may add, that the most devout and eminent students of the Bible have so interpreted the instincts and presentiments of our moral nature and the teachings of Scripture, as to receive this cherished doctrine among their fondest hopes of the future.

Baxter, speaking of his pious friends that had died in the Lord, expresses the firm persuasion of meeting them in heaven, and realizing there the perfection of that kindred affection that was begun on earth, but interrupted by death.

Dr. Chalmers, speaking of the death of a little child, says: "The blossom which withered here upon its stalk has been transplanted there to a place of endurance; and it will then gladden that eye which now weeps out the agony of an affection that has been sorely wounded."

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* Dr. Cheever — Powers of the World to Come.

Edwards said: "The father shall know that such a one was his child; and so all other relations of persons shall be renewed and known in heaven."

And Dr. Cumming, speaking upon this subject, expresses his conviction of this precious hope in his own peculiar and beautiful language: "Are we not told that death shall be destroyed? But if those bonds which were broken at death are not restored again in the realms of life, death is not annihilated; one of its deepest wounds survives; its heaviest blow is felt throughout the successive cycles of a futurity to come. But this cannot be. I look on the future as the restoration of scattered families, of suspended friendships, of broken circles; the reanimation of departed images; the apocalypse of faces we gazed upon below."

This sentiment is, therefore, no illusive hope of the sorrowing, but a blessed truth, inscribed by the finger of God upon the human heart—the "elder Scriptures" reaffirmed in the inspired Word, and echoed in the convictions of the wise and good in all ages. And what a hope is this of reunion and recognition of the loved and lost in the heavenly world, to cheer and sustain the bereaved and sorrowing!

From the gate of Eden—from that first gush of

parental sorrow over the murdered form of Abel, the first victim of death—what a continuous procession of mourners, headed by the first human parents — one long uninterrupted funeral procession, reaching down through all generations! What Rachels, weeping for their children because they are not! What rending of domestic ties and social affinities! What dispersion of family groups! Bitter, indeed, have been the farewells spoken in this world of the dying and the dead! But, blessed be God, the friends of Jesus, parted by death, shall meet again.

"A few short years of evil past,
We reach the happy shore,
Where *death-divided* friends at last
Shall meet to part no more!"

This should more than reconcile Christian parents to the death of their children. It should impart the element of joy into their cup of sorrow. The separation will be brief; and happy will be the home-greetings at the threshold of their Father's house.

The hope of such a recognition of your little ones in the many mansions, should make you feel as old Jacob did when they told him "Joseph is yet alive, and is governor over all Egypt." Your Joseph, whom they

hurried out of your sight, is yet alive, and sees the King in his beauty; "he thinks of you; and perhaps inquires for you of those who come to Heaven, as Joseph did concerning his father." This thought should lead you, like the patriarch, to exclaim, "It is enough. Joseph, my son, is yet alive; I will go and see him, not before, but when I die." And that touching scene where Jacob met his long-lost son, who "fell on his neck and wept," and the ecstatic father exclaimed, "Now let me die, since I have seen thy face," that affecting scene is but a faint prefiguration of the meeting above, where parents shall fold their long-lost children, then youthful seraphs, to their throbbing hearts, with the ecstatic consciousness that they shall never part again.

O, the joy of this reunion of the loved and lost—the sweet rapture of meeting in the home-gatherings of our Father's house! It was blessed to meet in the night, though chill and dark; it was happy to meet on earth, and in homes shaded with sin and sorrow. What must it be to meet in the presence of God, the heavenly home where sin can never disturb our peace, or sorrow mingle with our joys!

"And fears of parting chill—
Never, no, never!"

Let us catch the inspiration of this hope, and lift our hearts to that blissful home, and forget the parting sorrow in the animating prospect of reunion with our loved ones in our Father's house, the old *Homestead* of eternity, "where there is fullness of joy and pleasures forever more."

"O happy world! O glorious place!
Where all who are forgiven
Shall find their loved and lost below,
And hearts like meeting streams shall flow
Forever one in Heaven."

We close with this sweet version of Heaven: — The "Holy Child Jesus" enthroned in glory, environed with myriads of redeemed and glorified children, chanting their hallelujahs to the Lamb that was slain. Some of us have little ones among those "white-robed choristers" that encircle the throne, and unceasingly warble the music of their praise. And from their bright homes they speak to us; softly steals upon our hearts their call: "Come up hither! come to this bright and happy land! Come, and bring the children home with you when you come!"

And shall we not go? God granting us grace, we will. And bearing with us, in Christian nurture, and faith, and prayer, the children still confided to our care, hope to appear before Christ with the joyous exclamation, "Behold I and the children which God hath given me" —

"No wanderer lost —
A family in Heaven."

"Up to that world of light,
Take us, dear Saviour;
May we all there unite
Happy forever.
Where kindred spirits dwell,
There may our music swell,
And time our joys dispel —
Never — no, never!"

THE END.

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